

TRANSLATION from French
of the Thesis presented by Sr Marie Benedicte Ollivier
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DIEU TRINITE ENRACINEMENT DE LA MISSION
MISSION Rooted in the TRINITY

Translated by Margaret Spain

INTRODUCTION

At the end of twelve years of responsibility at the international level of the congregation, during which I had the opportunity to participate in the life of numerous missions spread throughout the four corners of the world, in a period when religious institutes were invited by the Church to return to the sources of their original charism in order to better serve in the world of our own time, I wanted to take up again several years of theological studies, in order to deepen the fundamental intuition of **Euphrasie Barbier** (1829 – 1893) foundress of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions. From the beginning of her institute, she had the gift of being able to see, under the movement of the Spirit, that every mission is a participation in the “divine missions” in God Trinity.

In the aftermath of Vatican II Council, the life of the congregation, like that of numerous apostolic religious institutes, was strongly marked by this return to the sources and filled with the desire to bring, in a more adequate way, the gospel message to the men and women of our time, in very diverse socio-political, cultural and religious contexts. It was a period of intense research at all levels : sociological analysis of the context, forward action planning for a better inculturation of Christian faith, option for justice and preferentially for the poor, insertion at the heart of peoples as different from our societies of the western world marked by scientific and technological development, as Australian Aboriginal peoples or the numerous ethnic groups of South-East Asia. But more than local mission programs or ways of working out what to do in this or that particular human community, it seemed vital to rediscover the original intuition which belongs just as much to the present as to the past.

Convinced that the first inspiration that guided the foundress is not a project which can lose its relevance, but a gift of the Spirit, a source of newness and fertility, we wanted to examine the writings of Euphrasie Barbier in a new way. Of course, she expressed herself in the language of her time, with her own words, but beneath a somewhat outdated style there lies hidden a spiritual depth and a theological approach to mission which relates well to that of the most recent Church documents – Council documents or those of Synods – placing the Church’s mission in a trinitarian perspective.¹

1. THE FUNDAMENTAL INTUITION OF EUPHRASIE BARBIER

¹ We could quote the dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*; the decree *Ad Gentes* on the missionary activity of the Church; the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, fruit of the Synod of Bishops in Rome 1974; the encyclicals of John Paul II *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986) on the Holy Spirit, and *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) on mission.

- Who was Euphrasie Barbier? (1829 – 1893)

Born in Caen in 1829, Euphrasie Barbier inherited, from her mother's side, the stability and the "peasant wisdom" of her ancestors, who knew only, during many generations, the limits of their own village. Her father, born in Guadeloupe from the marriage of a French soldier with a Creole, brought on the contrary, the attraction of far horizons. As an adolescent she thrilled, as did many of her contemporaries, in reading the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, with only one desire, to participate herself in the work of the missionaries, sent to the four corners of the world to tell the Good News.

In 1848, her dream seemed to become reality; she entered the novitiate of the Daughters of Calvary, a congregation recently founded for the foreign missions, in the diocese of Langres, but whose founder, a disciple of Felicite de Lammenais, was condemned by Rome for his "perverse, dangerous and foolish" teachings. Convinced that the future would prove him right, Father Chantome refused to withdraw his opinions.² The church authorities were worried about the influence he had over the new community, and as a result the Daughters of Calvary emigrated to England.

Under the guidance of the Oratorian Fathers and of their Superior, Father F.W. Faber, the Sisters of "Compassion" – a title which sounded better than Calvary to English ears! – found themselves involved in activities which took them away from the founding project. The missionary vocation of Euphrasie Barbier seemed to be blocked. Providence intervened. The Marist Fathers were looking for religious sisters who could take on the work of education in their missions of Oceania. Euphrasie Barbier saw in this a sign and, responding to this appeal, arrived in Lyon in 1861, in view of an imminent departure for New Zealand. But the way chosen by God was different from what she had imagined: instead of setting off for the missions of the Society of Mary, she became the foundress of a new missionary institute: the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions.

- Her missionary approach

Formed in the school of St Augustine (whose Rule she adopted), of the great scholastic theologians of the 13th century and of the masters of the French School of the 17th century, Euphrasie Barbier was drawn by the Spirit to the contemplation of God Trinity and of the divine missions which flow therefrom for the salvation of humanity. The preliminary chapter of the first Constitutions of the Institute (1871) explain clearly her trinitarian approach:

² Called before the diocesan tribunal for this refusal, Fr Chantome was condemned and banned from teaching, on January 2 1850. He submitted in 1852 and was rehabilitated by Bishop Guerrin, successor to Bishop Parisis. Cf. C. Guillemant, "Pierre Louis Parisis, Paris 1916. T.1, p.353.

“In placing themselves under the title of Our Lady of the Missions, the Sisters have the desire to honour the divine missions which were the object of the ardent wishes of Mary...”³

When she had presented, for the first time, the text of the Constitutions, for the approval of the Congregation of Bishops and Religious, she explained to the novices in Lyon the key idea of her missionary vision:

“In our Constitutions, we see first the title: Religious of Our Lady of the Missions. This title, for the ordinary person, says that first of all, we are dedicated to the foreign missions, under the protection of Mary. But it has, for us, a much deeper, interior meaning. Mission means “Sending”. Angel means one who is sent, apostle also. However, the only one who is sent, is God ...”⁴

Under the impulse of the Spirit, the foundress understands that the theology of the divine missions is at the foundation of the very existence of the Church. That which constitutes the Church at the most radical level, and which comes from the double mission of the Son and the Spirit has its source in God Trinity. The mission of the Spirit, gift of the Father and the Son, is inherent in the very mystery of the Church, when she proclaims the Word in order to carry out her missionary task. This is also the source of sanctification for humanity.

The juridical approach of the Church had forced E. Barbier, to her great regret, to remove from the text of the Constitutions all mention of the divine missions, but strengthened by her experience of missionary life, and with her characteristic stubbornness, she tried again in 1890:

“ As to the expression “Divine Missions”, we changed the wording of the article...showing clearly that we are not referring to our own poor missions, we who are nothing, but uniquely the mission of the incarnate Word, sent by God his Father to redeem the human race and the divine mission of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son to carry out the sanctification of the Church of Christ. That is the reason for the existence of the Institute and of its particular form, both interior and exterior.”⁵

The foundress is not thinking of “sending on mission” in the programmatic sense that is frequently given to this expression. Mission is born in God. It is rooted in the mission of the Son, the one sent by the Father, Word made flesh, and in the mission of the Spirit. In such a perspective, mission is not, in the first place, born out of the need of human beings for salvation, but from a necessity from within God. God is love and God gives Godself.

³ cf Text in annexe

⁴ Archives R.N.D.M. Writings vol.1, p.62. Conference on the Constitutions – 14.01.1870

⁵ Archives R.N.D.M. Writings vol.IV, p.150. Letter to Fr Bruno de Vinay O.F.cap. 22 May 1890. Text in annexe.

If the mystery of God Trinity is the most fundamental of our Christian faith, “it must be for us something other than a reality which can be put into abstract doctrinal formulas.”⁶ From our human experience, through the story of Salvation, we need to discover how the God whom we must proclaim to the world is none other than the One that the Scripture and Jesus himself call the Father, the one who sent his Son and who gives himself in the Spirit.

2. OUR WAY OF PROCEEDING

How can this approach to mission become concrete in the experience of a mission enfleshed in the reality of the Church and the world of human beings? How, faced with anthropological models that are radically different, can one announce the good news of Salvation? What is the heart of the message that missionaries are called to transmit, and which can be heard by all, regardless of culture or religious traditions ...? Does the affirmation of God Trinity have something to say of the reality of Christian experience in its existential dimension?

Faced with these questions as part of our lives, and which continue to preoccupy us, it is to the following questions that our work will be strongly attached:

If Jesus made known to his disciples the Name of the Father (Jn. 17: 6, 26) in revealing himself as the Son and has revealed that Father is the Name which expresses in the deepest way the being of God, how can we affirm that the Name of Jesus, through which is pronounced the Name of Father, becomes instrument of Salvation for all who believe in him, and that this Name may become source of life? (Jn. 20: 31)

How is mission rooted in the mission of the Son, the One Sent by the Father, and in the mission of the Spirit, in order to lead believers, through faith in Christ Jesus, to enter into communion with the life of God, Father, Son and Spirit?

To reply to these questions so vital for the mission, it seemed to us that, in a first part, it would be enlightening to ask one of the Fathers of the Church of the fourth century, “a century which turned out to be of capital importance for working out the theology of the Trinity”⁷ We chose a Latin Father: **Hilary of Poitiers** “who had the luck or the misfortune”, as J.M. Le Guillou says, “to live before Augustine who came to dominate so strongly the western tradition that, in the end, Hilary has been somewhat forgotten.”⁸ What is striking, in the first place, on reading Hilary, is that, without using abstract doctrinal formulas, and wanting to be faithful to

⁶ K. RAHNER, GOD TRINITY, TRANSCENDENT FOUNDATION OF SALVATION HISTORY. *Mysterium Salutis*. T. VI, p.47

⁷ J. DORE, INITIATION TO THE PRACTICE OF THEOLOGY. *Dogmatics I*. Cerf. 1982, p.217

⁸ M.J. LE GUILLOU, HILARY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST, p.39
In Hilary of Poitiers, Bishop and Doctor (368 – 1968). *Augustinian Studies* Paris 1968

Scripture, he lays out, in his **Treatise on the Trinity** the richness of the fundamental mystery of our Christian faith.

Immediately after the Council of Nicaea, the Bishop of Poitiers was confronted by the following theological question: the Christ is truly Son of God, in virtue of his true birth, but if we affirm a God, true Son of God, how can we understand that God is not alone, if God is One?

Starting with the themes of **Name** and **Birth**, Hilary points us towards the revelation of the mystery of communion in God Trinity and will provide us with the fundamental elements on the mission of the Son, Word made flesh, and the mission of the Spirit. We will limit ourselves mainly to the seventh and eighth books of the **Treatise on the Trinity**.

In a second part, we will go back to the source of the apostolic mission, by analysing the fourth chapter of the **Acts of the Apostles**, not in order to find there a model, or a preestablished plan, but, more than anything, the primitive witness of a Church which is born in mission. Three key words will guide our reading of Acts 4: 1-31 : the **Name**, the **Word** and the **Sending**. The ministry of the Name and the service of the Word are the duty of the apostles, sent as witnesses to communicate, in the strength of the Spirit, the good news of Salvation to the ends of the earth. We will try to follow how this worked out and to discover its effects in the world of human beings, called in our day as in the past, through faith in Christ, to enter into a life of communion in the life of God, Father, Son and Spirit.

FIRST PART

THE MYSTERY OF THE SON,
THE ONE SENT FROM THE FATHER,
IN THE COMMUNION OF THE SPIRIT

ACCORDING TO HILARY OF POITIERS

INTRODUCTION

HILARY OF POITIERS (310? - 368)

We have very little information about where Hilary came from. According to the majority opinion of historians, he was born at Poitiers between 310 and 320. We can assume that he belonged to the higher social class, that of landowners and magistrates, in the province of Aquitaine which was the most “Romanised” of the provinces of Gaul. Married, most probably, before being fully committed as a Christian, and with a daughter named Abra (Fortunat: VITA S. HILARII. 1, 3.6.13) he was baptised as an adult, some time before being made bishop: “regeneratus pridem in episcopatu aliquantisper permanens”. (De Trin.VI, 21 PL.10, 173a)⁹

As bishop, from around the year 350, Hilary, filled with unshakeable faith, led his Church strongly through the years of turmoil which followed the Council of Nicaea. He stood forcefully against the bishops who tended to follow the Arian ideas, putting in doubt the “consubstantiality” of the Son. Furthermore, with lucidity and courage he opposed the Emperor’s decrees, and hence was sent into exile in Phrygia for four years. He used this time of “house arrest” to write his masterpiece the Treatise on the Trinity and “De Synodis”. If he showed firmness with regard to heresy, he also showed a talent for reconciliation, and was in some sense “the link between the Bishops of Gaul and the Eastern Bishops, all through the post-Nicaean crisis”.¹⁰

Without naming all his writings, we can mention his Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, composed before his exile, and his book Adversus Valentem et Ursacium (356 – 357). His masterpiece is incontestably De Trinitate. This title was only given much later by Cassiodorus and Venantius Fortunat (who died near the year 600). Jerome quotes it under the title: Adversus Arianos (Against the Arians); others call it De Fide (On Faith), which seems to have been the title of the first part (Book I – III)

De Trinitate is not a cold, academic way of thinking about God Trinity, but in the first place an expression of faith, a theological and spiritual reflection on the central mystery of Christian faith; it begins and ends in prayer. Hilary wants to show that the Son of God, by his human

⁹ This brief biographical note is borrowed from the article on Hilary of Poitiers

In the Dictionary of Spirituality Tome 7 (1969) , 466 – 499.

¹⁰ M.J.Le Guillou op.cit. p.40

birth, has his place at the heart of humanity in order to transfigure the human by the divine, the visible by the invisible, in order to lead us into communion with Father and Son in the Spirit.

FIRST CHAPTER

THE SON IS GOD

With the desire to present the true teaching on the divinity of the Son, to which he has already born witness in the first books of his treatise On the Trinity, Hilary declares openly, at the beginning of Book VII, that he is opposed to all those who sow error in the Church: Marcel of Ancyre, follower of Sabellius, Photinus whom he links with Hebion, and especially Arius.¹¹

In the name of his faith and of his duty as bishop, Hilary wants to follow the way of the evangelical teaching, “a rough and steep road” that he must climb, watchful for the ambushes of those who, while pretending to have a sincere attachment to God, put in danger the good faith of believers. The heresy aims at “having people believe that Our Lord Jesus Christ is neither Son of God, nor God”. All through the preceding books, using the support of the Law and the Prophets, Hilary aims at showing that such a declaration is false and that we must recognize “God from God, while at the same time affirming one true God.” (Tr. VII.2)

In the light of the Scriptures, and especially of the Gospels, and not by using speculative arguments, Hilary is going to try to prove this truth: Christ is true God in virtue of his true birth; true Son of God, he is also true God. Hilary is affronted by a fundamental theological question which he expresses in these terms:

- Can we affirm as orthodox teaching that God is One, if we understand by that that God is alone, for God the Son could not be understood in the faith in a solitary God?
- But if we affirm a God Son of God, do we not risk not maintaining our faith in one unique God?

¹¹ Brief notice on :

Marcel of Ancyre : one of the controversial figures of 4th century whom the Arians accused of Sabellianism

Sabellius: theologian of Roman origin, of the 3rd century, saw in the Son only a manifestation of the Father as redeemer, without being distinct from him. (VII.3.5.6.7.

Hebion: non-historical person considered as the founder of a Judeo-Christian sect of the first century, called Hebionism (from ebioni : the poor). This sect did not believe in the pre-existence of the Word and considered Jesus as the equal of the other prophets. (VII.3.7.)

Arius: leading heretic from Alexandria (280 – 336), priest, who denied the perfect equality of the Son with the Father and therefore his divinity, as expressed in the whole of Hilary’s treatise.

He puts the question in a concise formula:

- How can we understand God to be not alone if God is One?

The bishop of Poitiers understands that it is just as dangerous to deny the unity of God as it is to proclaim that God is solitary. Faced with the propositions of his opponents, he decides to keep to the Scriptures and to the faith he professed at his baptism:

“I stand against what they are saying and proclaim God the Father and God the Son, affirming also that the Father and the Son have only one name, only one nature, in one and the same divinity.” (Tr. VII,8)

The issue for Hilary is therefore to demonstrate the unity of nature in God the Father and in the Son, and his demonstration is organized around two themes: **NAME** and **BIRTH**.

A. THE NAME

What is at stake in Book VII of On the Trinity is vitally important in the eyes of Hilary of Poitiers “in order to understand the content of a perfect faith”. (Tr.VII, 1)

In the preceding books, he already gives multiple witness accounts of the divinity of the Son, through the Law and the Prophets, through the teaching of the Gospels and of the Apostles.

His reflection now moves to the importance and the meaning of the Name. The question that Hilary asks himself is to know who the Lord Jesus Christ is: “What name do we give the Son?” Simply the Name of God, he replies, referring to the prologue of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Jn.1,1) (Tr.VII,9)

1. The Concept of Name

When we must look at the difficult question of the Name of God, in theology, it can be enlightening to start from the concept of name, in an anthropological perspective. In every human group, the name is indispensable as a way of designating a person, calling that person, referring to the person, in short “naming” the person. From this perspective, we can pay attention in particular to three aspects: the name has a function of identification, the name brings into existence, it is also the entry into the world of language.

- **The name confers identity.**

The name serves to designate a person, to identify him/her. It is like a guarantee of the recognition of the being, of the unique character of each individual. To be a human person is to have your own name, a name received, by which you can be called and in which you recognize yourself.¹² When we state our identity, we reply by our name. I can only name myself because I have been named. And this received name, linked to my face, to my person, “represents the permanency of my identity and seals my right to be recognized by others as

¹² Universal Encyclopedia. Vol. XI. Art. The Name, p.61 ss.

who I am. I carry it and it supports me in my identity".¹³ Where the name is, there is the person, recognized as one subject, like nobody else, unique.

- **The name confers existence.**

The gift of the name is not just any old action. It fits into the logic of the gift of life: to give a name is to call to life, to make the person exist. An individual without a name has no existence, is not recognized as a person. The name gives the assurance of personal identity and at the same time the consciousness of belonging to a family, to a community. Whatever the traditions around naming, varied according to the civilisations and societies, "the name is indissociable from the symbolic function of fatherhood".¹⁴ In giving the name, the father exercises his responsibility, he affirms that he intends to be responsible for the existence of the child that he recognizes. The name places the child in a particular lineage, it indicates the place of each one in a genealogy, which gives the child a permanent place in time and assures the survival of the name. There exists an existential link between the name and the being: "When a name is not given to a human being, he/she has no right to die, in a manner of speaking, since he/she has not been given the right to live. A human being only lives as named."¹⁵ The name belongs with the being, it gives life.

- **The name gives entry to the world of language.**

To name someone is to call them. The act of naming is the word in action. "To name a child, writes P. Beauchamp, is to place and fix for another a word on a being of the world."¹⁶ The name is not a word quite like others; the word lives in it and it begins a communication. What is born with life, what life is when the name is given, is the possibility of speaking. According to the formula of J. Lacan: "The name is the one who calls, and who calls someone to speak."¹⁷

The name is a message. When one calls someone by their name, their face lights up, they feel recognized. The name opens into relationship.

Replying to one's name is one of the first moves into language. The one who has a name is not only a subject who speaks, s/he becomes a being of language. The name puts one into a relationship of dialogue with another person. It gives one the possibility to hear "you" and to

¹³ A. Vergote, *Interpretation of religious Language*, Seuil 1974, p.118 -120

¹⁴ A.Vergote, *op. cit.*, p. 120

¹⁵ Quoted by Joel Clerget, *The Name and Naming*. Eres, Toulouse 1990, p.12

¹⁶ P. Beauchamp, *One Testament and the Other*, T.I., Paris 1976, p. 75-76

¹⁷ J. Clerget, *op. cit.*, p.67

say “I”, that is, to be a subject. The name makes us remember that our law is that of language which allows us the capacity of being in relationship with others, in order to become, in communication, a being of dialogue.

2. Is It Possible to Name God?

If the particular name is the point at which the word comes in to constitute the subject and bring into the world of language, can God be designated by a name?

Is it possible to designate by a name the one who does not belong to the world of our immediate and tangible experience? Does not the naming of God go beyond this anthropological perspective?

- Know the name of God?

In the domain of religion, people have always given importance to the name of their divinity. The people of Israel were no exception to the common rule, they want to know the name of their God, for a human being can only invoke God if s/he knows God’s name. How indeed make oneself heard by the One we don’t know how to name?

The name designates, in a general way, “the secret nature of a being, not by means of a definition, but because it contains a sort of active presence. Where the name is, there is the person with his/her power ready to reveal him/herself.”¹⁸ As a consequence of the strong equivalence which exists between the name of a being and her/his intimate nature, the name is enough for the believer who invokes his/her God. The name is sufficient to designate God, to call God, it does not define God. The invocation of the Name of God becomes the sign of God’s mysterious presence.

- God names Godself

Invested with a mission to God’s people, Moses asks what he is to say to the Israelites. But more than the content of the message, he wants to know the name of the mysterious being who is speaking to him.

“But if they say to me: What is Your name? What will I say to them?

God said to Moses: “I am who I am.” This is what you will say to the Israelites: “I am” has sent me to you. (Ex.3,14-15)

God names Godself, God gives Godself a particular name YHWH. God is a being who says of Godself “I Am”. God’s name is not a noun, but a verb in the present tense, uttered twice and accompanied by a subject pronoun. This repetition consecrates a “now” which is emphasised

¹⁸ A.M.Besnard, The Mystery of the Name, Cerf , Paris 1962, p.21

in declaring the permanent nature of God's name: "It is my name for always". Ex.3,15. It is THE NAME pre-eminently.

In naming Godself, God engages a dialogue, it is a word in action: this Name calls, it does not define God. "The religious way of speaking, in naming God, is not speaking about God, but speaks God." ¹⁹ Revealed and hidden at the same time, the Name of YHWH is unutterable. It signifies the very mystery of God; it is like the sign of the invisible God. God does not give a name. God is Word. What will be the characteristic of the New Testament, is precisely the fact that God names Godself with a name of language: Word, Utterance. The Name of YHWH fulfils therefore, for Israel's faith, a function of knowledge and of revelation.

How does Hilary of Poitiers, in his theological reflection, approach the question of the naming of Christ Jesus? Basing himself on the Prologue of John, he affirms: "to name the Lord Jesus Christ, is to give him the name of Word and to recognize him as God." By this formula, he means that the name given to Christ fulfils the same function as the name of YHWH: a function of understanding: it identifies; a function of life: there is an existential connection between the name and his being of God, and indeed he is Word of God, incarnation of the Word. Through him, God speaks. "Now, the revelation, which is the foundation of the new covenant, just as the Name of YHWH characterised the Mosaic covenant, is no longer that of a name, but of a Person..... it is no longer a word; it is the very Person of Christ Jesus." ²⁰

B.ONE AND ONLY NAME, ONE AND ONLY NATURE

Faithful to the faith of Nicaea, the bishop of Poitiers declares that the Christ, Son of God, is God: "He bears the Name of God, he is God by his birth, he possesses God's nature, he shows the power of God, he declares himself God." (Tr. VII,9) In his eyes, the text of the Prologue of John's Gospel adequately expresses his faith in the divinity of Christ, but he has to convince his readers. This Son, Word present with God in the beginning, can it be said of him: Son of God and God, in the strict meaning of those terms? There is a difference between the name simply attributed or as if he were God by adoption and the name which is his by nature. In order to show this difference, Hilary bases his argument on two texts of the Old Testament: Ex. 7, 1 and Psalm 81, 6; then, in John's Gospel, he appeals to the witness of Thomas (Jn. 20:28).

¹⁹ A.Vergote, op.cit., p 123

²⁰ A.M.Besnard, op. cit., p 175

1. One Name: God

On reading Book 7 of the Treatise **On the Trinity**, it is striking to see how Hilary, in his theological reflection on the Name given to the Son of God, is able to classify different ways of using “name”. It is enlightening to follow the progress of his thought: he starts from a name in the language, given by a metaphor, then mentions the bestowal of a name used as a way of speaking about someone, and, in the end, he finishes up with the Name recognized in faith.

- A name given by metaphor.

The first text chosen by Hilary is taken from the story of the call of Moses who hears God say: “I am making you like God for Pharaoh”. (Ex. 7: 1) Entrusted by YHWH to announce to Pharaoh the plagues which are going to fall on Egypt if he does not let the Hebrew people go, Moses is invested with an exceptional power. Whether he is chasing off the flies or sending away the hailstones, whether he is ridding the country of the locusts that he himself had caused to appear, he is only an instrument of God. Faced with these prodigies, the magicians are forced to recognize the finger of God. However, neither Pharaoh nor the magicians look upon Moses as a god, but they see in him one sent by God, a mediator to be feared and whom they beg to intercede so that the plagues will cease. Pharaoh recognizes the power of God in the works of Moses:

“This time I have sinned. It is YHWH who is just, I and my people are in the wrong.” (Ex.9:27)

The name of “god” given to Moses is a comparison used by the author, a play on words, in order to describe Moses’ power. The attribution of the title of God is a way of naming which works within the story, it does not express any equivalence between the name and the nature of this man. “It is one thing to be given “like god”, quite another to be God, Hilary continues. Moses possesses neither the nature nor the name of God, because he is not God.” (Tr. VII, 10)

- A name attributed by the author.

The second example chosen by Hilary, in the Old Testament, is based on a verse of Psalm 81:

“I, I have said, you are gods.” (v.6)

For the bishop of Poitiers, in this text, it is only a case of bestowing a name, of a way of naming, freely chosen by the subject who uses it. There is a subject who speaks: “I, I have said”. He uses a name as a way of referring to someone: “you are gods”. The one who names is using what amounts to a play on words. Hilary underlines the difference which exists between this way of naming, and that which consists in giving a name which corresponds to the nature of the thing (res – Latin) named. In the Latin text, the word “res” indicates a permanent nature, as against “accidens” which is something added to nature. Indeed, comments Hilary, “in the case where someone tells us he is going to call us this, this name which only comes from the author’s way of speaking, has nothing to do with the kind of name which expresses the substance”. (Tr.VII, 10) For, if we allow the names of God and of Son by adoption, as is claimed by those who oppose the orthodox understanding, this is to deny in Christ his true nature of God and his being Son. Hilary takes up again the key text of the Prologue of John’s Gospel which he has quoted several times in his treatise:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

The Word is God. He is not called God. The brevity of the Latin sentence, in Hilary's text, makes the author's thought stand out clearly: "res existit in Verbo, Verbi res enuntiatur in nomine" (Tr.VII, 11), a formula that one can translate literally: the thing exists in the Word, the thing of the Word is announced in the name. The thing (res) means the permanent nature, the reality of God. Hilary makes clear that we are here beyond the ways of naming in the language of the author. He is going to turn to the witness of a New Testament text, the meeting of the apostle Thomas with the risen Christ.

- **A name recognized in faith.**

In the presence of Jesus risen, Thomas cries out: "My Lord and my God" (Jn.20,28). This spontaneous exclamation is a way of speaking different from the ways of naming considered before. The confession of the apostle is an act of recognition and no longer simply a way of calling the name. The name of God which he gives to Christ Jesus lies at the heart of a profession of faith. In the person of the Master whom he has known and followed, he recognizes his Lord and his God. Hilary is careful to recall that the apostle, as a faithful Israelite, cannot be ignorant of the first commandment of the Law of the Lord: "Listen Israel, the Lord your God is One". (Deut.6,4) This first sentence of Israel's profession of faith, Thomas could not forget, since he had to confess the unique God in order to have life. In the light of the resurrection, the apostle understands that he is in the presence of his Lord and of his God. Without denying his faith in the one unique God, he confesses the Name which expresses the divine nature of Christ Jesus, the Christ, is God.

It is no longer question of a name attributed by metaphor referring to someone speaking, or of whom one speaks. No more is it an honorary title that Thomas might give to Christ Jesus, but it is the recognition of his nature as God. The supreme proclamation of Jewish faith: "The Lord is One" is not in contradiction with the teaching of the Master, whom Thomas heard declare often: "I and the Father are One" (Jn. 10:30), "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me" (Jn.14:11). The mysterious plan of Salvation, to which Thomas holds by faith, appears to him in its totality. Because he understands the truth of the mystery revealed in the Gospel, the apostle recognizes the Christ for his Lord and his God. He has heard his teaching, he has witnessed his actions and his miracles, he sees him risen. For him, only the divine nature is capable of passing through death to life. Overcome by his presence, Thomas cries out: "My Lord and my God". In his faith, he can recognize that "in the Son of God, there is no other true divine nature than that possessed by the Father". (Tr.VII, 12)

The Christ himself fully welcomes Thomas' profession of faith and confirms it: "You believed because you saw; happy those who have not seen and believe." (Jn.20:29) How, Hilary wonders, could the Christ welcome this profession of faith? He, the loving Son of God who has not done his own will, but that of the one from whom he comes, would not have accepted that he be given the honour of the divine Name, if he were not God; it would have been to deny this one God whom he preached." (Tr.VII, 12) Not only does he not refuse the witness of Thomas, but he recognizes as his own the Name of God and thus declares his divinity. This authentic recognition puts the Name in its true position. The Christ fully assumes the Name he bears, and confirms himself in his identity, for himself and for the others.

At this point in Hilary's treatise, the choice of the witness of Thomas opens a new perspective. It places the apostle at the junction between the faith of Israel and the faith in Christ risen. Thus, the passage, from the old covenant, with the one God, to the new faith in Jesus-Christ, Son of God, happens around the **NAME**, a name not given simply like any name or as a convention, but a name which bears the reality of the being of Christ-Jesus, **GOD**, his only authentic name.

2. ONE SAME NATURE

-God is the name of only one nature.

"God is the name of only one identical nature. One name cannot therefore designate two gods." (Tr.VII, 13) The name of God given to the Son underlines the unity of his divine nature. If the Son of God is God, he is true God. Using two analogies, fire and water, Hilary tries to explain what the truth of one same nature means:

"If you state, it is fire, but it is not true fire, or, it is water, but it is not true water, I do not see very well what you mean! This is what I do not understand: how does the truth of one nature differ from the truth of this same nature? If it is fire, it can only be true fire; if the nature of fire is present it cannot fail to be true fire. (Tr.V, 14)

He continues his reasoning along the same logic: either the Son of God is true God, if he is God; or, if he is not true God, he cannot be what God is. For if he does not possess the divine nature, he has no right to the name which is the prerogative of this nature.

Since the Father is God, since the Son is God, the name which designates both one and the other is the name which properly belongs to the divine nature; the two are One. (Tr. VII, 13) In order to know one, we must know the other, for the nature is the same in one as in the other; and since they do not differ in any way, we contemplate on one hand and on the other, the nature which properly belongs to them. The one who is God is nothing other than God.

- "He Is".

God is a being who says of Godself "I am". From the beginning of his treatise, in his quest of truth, Hilary expresses his admiration before such a definition of God. When we name God, we name the one who "is" truly. More than a quality proper to God, the name designates God's substance, God's nature. There is no attribute more appropriate to God than being, because what cannot be understood either of what will finish one day, or of what has had a beginning. (Tr.1,5) God "is" by nature:

"This is my name forever; it is by this that I will be invoked from generation to generation." (Exod.3,15).

Hilary emphasises the importance of the word "being". "Esse non est accidens nomen, sed subsistens veritas et manens causa et naturalis generis proprietas". (Tr.VII,11) The word "being" is not an "accidental" name, it expresses an existing truth, a permanent principle (causa), the proper character of its natural modality. God is the one who IS, it is the proper Name of God which corresponds to God's intimate being, God's substance or nature,

-God is “Word”.

In the light of the revelation of the divine Name in the Book of Exodus, the text of the Prologue of John becomes clear to Hilary: “When I hear: “The Word was God” (Jn. 1:1), I not only understand that it speaks of God the Word, but I grasp in this text the evidence that the Word is God.” (Tr.VII,11) It is not “the emission of a sound, as the heretics state, it is a personal reality; it is a nature, not a speech”. (Tr.II, 15) As Son, Christ Jesus is the existing Word, the Word of God, the origin of every word. It is from him that is born every manifestation of the Word of God in creation and in the history of Salvation. In other words, we can say that God is Word in Jesus-Christ, eternal communication of Godself; through him, God reveals Godself and speaks.

At this stage of our reflection, the question of the Name, such as Hilary of Poitiers presents it in Of the Trinity, has led us to recognize in Jesus-Christ, Son of God and God himself, the revelation of God who IS and of God who SPEAKS.

“GOD IS”, such is the characteristic of Godself; this is God’s Name. God reveals Godself in the simple act of being. “The verbal structure of the Name indicates that it is not a defined representation, but an affirmation of the undefinable: **“He is”**.²¹ This affirmation of being applies only to God. When we name God, we name the one who alone truly “is”, and this way of naming is totally adequate. In God, there is total identity between Being and Name.

God is **WORD**. God is a being of language. God spoke to Moses, with the mission to transmit God’s word and to make God known as the Unique. “After speaking to the people of Israel through the prophets, God speaks to us through God’s Son”. (Heb.1, 1) The being of God is written in human language, God is Word. As Word of God, present in the beginning with God and God himself, Christ Jesus is the Word; he reveals to us the mystery of his birth as eternal Son of God, incarnate Word. These are truths about God which can only be known if God speaks to us.

It is no longer question for Hilary to know who God is, the question is to know who is Christ Jesus. Starting from the issue of the Name, he has managed to affirm that the Name given to the Son expresses the identity of his being: he is God, truly God. Hilary now pursues his theological reflection by addressing the mystery of the **Birth of the Son**, in order to discover if the understanding of the person of Jesus of Nazareth, as perceived by the apostles and the community of believers, corresponds to the faith of the Church which confesses in the person of Christ Jesus, the true Son of God.

SECOND CHAPTER

THE BIRTH OF THE SON

After having recognized, following Hilary, that Christ Jesus carries the name of God, that he has the nature of God, we must now approach the mystery of his birth. This mystery is the pivotal point of the theological reflection of the Bishop of Poitiers in the On the Trinity, and

²¹ F. Genuyt, *The Mystery of God*, Desclee, 1962, p.31-32

particularly in Book VII where he states: The Son is God through his birth: “Ex Deo Deus cum nativitatis veritas subsistens”: He is God from God in the truth of his birth”. (Tr. VII, 11)
We will follow Hilary in his reading of the origin of the Son, God born of God, living God born of the living God, “come from God” and sent into the world. He will reveal to us the mystery of the Word who was in the beginning without beginning and who became flesh and blood in order to share our human condition.

A. GOD BORN OF GOD

Aware of his responsibility as a pastor, Hilary wants to reply to the arguments advanced by the heretics, but especially, in spite of the difficulty of the task, he wants to convince his listeners of the existence of the Son of God, in the nature which is his by his true birth. He has to go deeper into this mystery of the divine generation in fidelity to the faith of the Church.

1. BORN AND NOT CREATED

In Book VI of On the Trinity, Hilary appeals to numerous witnesses to affirm the divinity of the Son: the witness of the Father and the Son, the witness of the apostles and of the faithful Christians. He denounces the bad faith of the Arians who insinuate that the Son has come from nothing: “The Son is created and established before all time; he did not exist before being born.” (Tr.VI,4) In a polemical tone, he addresses himself to Arius and presents concisely the Arian teaching: “In your eyes, he would be son by adoption, labelled god, first-born in rank, wholly a creature and in no sense God.” (Tr.VI,18)

-Born of the substance of God

If, as the heretics state, the Son is son by adoption and not born of God, how can we understand the nature of divine generation? Would the birth of the Son give him a new nature which would not be that of God?

Hilary appeals to common sense to declare that we cannot say that a being has by birth a nature different than the one from which it draws its origin. Starting from a concrete example, in animal reproduction, he tries to explain that a being conceived by different natures could come into existence carrying some new characteristic, but, under a different nature, we can recognize the characters of its two parents. The new being unites in itself the particularities of its two roots. Hilary thence states that “birth does not confer anything other than the nature of the parent. There could be no birth, if what is the specific character of the nature of the parent is not found in the child.” (Tr.VII,14) He understands birth as the proof of the permanence of the one who is its author. If such a truth is evident in beings of flesh and blood, what can it be in the mystery of the divine “birthing” of the Son of God?

According to the Arian doctrine, the Son, although called God, is in reality a creature more perfect than others, but whose origin is nothing. He would not possess the divine nature and would receive another nature foreign to God. He would thus be created and not born.

Hilary returns unrelentingly to his teaching: the Son does not come from nothing, but from the Father’s substance. He bases this on the text of John: “What is born of the flesh is flesh, what

is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3,6) “Since God is Spirit, certainly, the Son does not possess a nature different from that of the one from whom he is born, and foreign to that nature.” (Tr.VII,14) The Son does not owe his origin to something extrinsic to the Father, but to his intimate substance. The Son, in order to be God, is born of God. Consequently, Hilary continues in a very strong turn of phrase, it is the birth of God which ensures the perfection of Godself: “Nativitas igitur Dei Deum perfecit ut Deum non coeptus intelligatur esse sed natus” (Tr.VII,14 185 ES). The birth of God “fulfils” God, in such a way that we could not conceive of a God who had begun to exist, but a God who is born.

-Be born or begin to exist?

What distinction can we make between begin to exist and be born? In our normal way of speaking, these two terms are practically synonymous. Hilary, for his part, places himself in a theological framework and makes a distinction between to be born and to begin to exist. By concrete examples, borrowed from material reality, he tries to explain how a thing which begins to exist comes out of nothing into existence or ceases to be, in order to pass from one state to another. Gold is drawn from the earth, liquids are born from solids, purple dye comes from a white shell.... On the contrary, the Son of God does not begin to be God out of nothing, but he is born: “Deus autem filius neque ex nihilo Deus coepit esse, sed natus est.” (Tr.VII,14)

All through his treatise, Hilary untiringly repeats the same truth: come to birth means that a living nature comes out of a living being, while to be created is to be called out of nothing into existence. The Son is God by his birth, and birth communicates an identical nature, equal to his origin. Through generation the Father transmits to the Son all that he is. The Son receives nothing other, in his birth, than what the Father possesses, what he **IS**. “He was never anything other before being God.” (Tr.VII,14) “He is born from the Father, he who has received his nature from the Father; it is in this nature that he received at his birth, he is not subsequent to the divine nature.” (Tr.VII,22)

-Freed from time

By these statements, Hilary introduces into his argument the dimension of time and eternity. From the beginning of his treatise, he has tried to refute the arguments of the Arians who want to show the contradiction between come to birth and exist forever. How could he come to birth, the one who exists forever? The one who is eternal? - If to come to birth means to begin, according to Arius that would mean that the one who is born has not always existed, therefore the Son, born of God, cannot be eternal nor can he be God.

Several times, in order to reply to his adversaries, Hilary refers to the text from John: “In the beginning was the Word” (Jn.1:1) He invites his reader to “free oneself from time, to break the bonds of centuries” in order to contemplate the beginnings: “In the beginning God created heaven and earth” (Gen.1:1). The Word of God “was” what he is. He is not enclosed in time as such, in order to begin to exist. He “was”, he was not made. (Tr.II,13) Without even beginning, the Word is with God, this God who is before all beginning. “The use of an imperfect tense: “he was”, and the mention “of a beginning without beginning” places the birth of the Son outside of all duration, in the eternal being of God .²² Because through him,

²² B. Sesboue, *Jesus Christ in the Tradition of the Church*, Desclee, Paris 1982,p.301

everything was made (Jn. 1:3), time also comes from him, it is “impossible to enclose him in temporal limits which have been fixed by him.” (Tr.II,22)

It is therefore evident, for Hilary, that in this theological vocabulary, to be born and to begin to exist are distinct terms. In the mystery of the birth of the Son, there is no beginning, however there is birth. (Tr.VII,14) If the Father is eternally Father, it must be that the Son is Son eternally. The eternity of the Son means that he is born eternally. The truth of such a mystery goes beyond human understanding, but the Bishop of Poitiers, confronted by the Arian theories, appeals to the faith of the Church, “....the Church confesses an eternal Father without beginning; she also confesses the eternal origin of the Son, not a Son with a beginning, but a Son born of the One who is without beginning; a Son who does not exist through himself, but who comes from the One who exists eternally without beginning; a Son from all eternity, that is to say, receiving his birth from the eternal Father.” (Tr.IV,6)

The mystery of the birth of the Son, by shedding light on the fundamental relationship which unites the Father and the Son, as “Persons”, reveals an essential aspect of our own human condition: the truth of the human being belongs to the filial reality of every person who comes into this world. If, in Christian faith, the mystery of the birth of the Son is understood in this way, the believer is seen as a filial subject.

2. LIVING GOD BORN OF THE LIVING GOD

The faith of the Church, which the Bishop of Poitiers professes with deep conviction, knows only one Lord Jesus Christ, born of God as God, fully God in his true birth, living God born of the living God.

-The mystery of birth is LIFE.

In order that there be a birth, life is not called forth out of nothing, but life has its source in life. God, in the mystery of birth, is life. And this God who is life does not have existence out of inanimate elements brought together. As a way of shedding light on how to understand such a mystery, Hilary searches for analogies, even if, obviously, they are imperfect and inadequate to explain divine realities. As he declared in the preceding books: “That which is beyond words, it is impossible to encompass in the boundaries of one way of speaking, whatever it may be.” (Tr.I,19; IV,2)

The first analogy is taken from human birth. The author’s idea is of course materialistic and pessimistic when he speaks about the transmission of life: “The “inanimate and shameful” elements which are at the source of every birth, come from the father to enter into another human being, they remain nevertheless in the father and in the child by the power of nature.” (Tr.VII,28). The father transmits a seed of life, but he does not transmit all his living substance. The child therefore has its life and its nature from the life and the nature of its father. The one who gives life passes, in some sense, into the one who is born, and the one who is born lives on in the one who gives life.

Hilary knows very well that the mystery of the birth of God surpasses every kind of human transmission of life. God is life and, from life, only a living being can come. Christ himself states that all life comes from the living God: “Just as the Father has life in himself, he has given the Son to have life in himself.” (Jn.5,26) It is necessary, affirms Hilary, following on from the unity of the divine nature and from the mystery of this ineffable birth, that the child live in the Living one and that he possess in himself the life of the Living one (literally the living life): *Necesse est per naturae unitatem et perfectae atque inerrandae nativitatis sacramentum ut et in vivente vivat et in se habeat vitam viventem.*” (Tr.VII,27. 198.D) As all the life of the Son is born of the life of the Father, the life of the Son is in the Father and the life of the Father remains in the Son. The Son is in the Living one and he is himself the Living one. Just as the Father has life and is life, so also, he has given the Son to possess life in himself and to be life. If Hilary can affirm, in faith, that Christ is Life, born of the living God, as the living God, it is because God is a simple being, in whom **having** and **being coincide**. (Tr.VIII,43)

We cannot think about composition in God as we might in a human being, that would open the door to plurality. The essence of God is to **be**. God is wholly and entirely in the act of existence; God is the being of being. “Here is what the Church understands, what the synagogue does not believe, what philosophy does not feel”, declares the Bishop of Poitiers, “The One comes from the One, the All proceeds from the All, he is God and he is Son and, by his knowledge, he does not take away from fullness from the Father, while he possesses in himself, in being born, all this fullness.” (Tr.VIII,52)

-God is Life, God is Light.

The Son is God, born of the living God, Light born of the Light. The theme of light has an important place among the religious symbols that Scripture uses. It is not surprising therefore, to find it in the writings of the Fathers. Hilary, faithful to this tradition, himself borrows this symbol of the flame, to emphasise the unity of nature and the distinction of persons in God. Of course, we cannot compare God to anything whatsoever, but the Bishop of Poitiers wants to start off with a concrete example. He questions his reader:

“When fire is born of fire, is there separation or division?

Here a flame is lit from another flame by a process which resembles birth: is the nature of fire cut in two, no longer remaining what it was? No separation, and yet is there not a light born of a light?” (Tr.VII,29)

Thus it is, keeping in mind all limitations, with God the Son, Light born of Light, as the first flame lives in the second which owes its existence to the first, the second lives in the first from which it comes forth, in the same way “the Father and the Son are naturally one in the other, since the birth of the Son comes only from the Father, since in God there exists no other nature outside of God’s own, or which would be different from God. (Tr.VII, 31)

In these two analogies, Hilary takes up again the theological question that he posed at the beginning of Book VII: “In order that our faith may not go off the track towards a solitary God or another God.”(Tr.VII, 8) “The Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son, without transference, or transfusion from one into the other, but through the perfect birth of a living nature.” Thus, he says to his reader: “You do not count God the Father and God the Son as

two gods, since the one and the other are One. You are not professing a solitary God, since one and the other are not only one person.” (Tr.VII,31)

“The faith received from the apostles does not therefore allow for two gods....in recognizing the Father, it recognizes the Son, by believing in the Son, we believe also in the Father since the Name of the Father must include the Name of the Son.” Thus, the birth which constitutes the mysterious distinction of persons maintains the perfect unity between the Father and the Son. (Tr.VII,31)

-The Son, living image of the living God

The Christ, Son of God, living God born of the living God, Light born of Light, is “the perfect image of the Father”. The theme of image and likeness is a foundational theme in Scripture: the human being is created “in the image of God” (Gen.1:26-29). Christ is the “image of the invisible God” (Col.1:15) Very obvious in the theology of the Fathers, as much Greek as Latin, Hilary uses this theme in several places in On the Trinity. Two texts serve as a basis for his reflection on the birth of the Son: that of Paul (Col.1:15) and that of John: “The one who has seen me, has seen the Father also” (John.14:9)

At the beginning of his treatise, when the Bishop of Poitiers wants to justify the foundation of the Christian faith, he goes to its roots in baptism. Recalling the command of the Lord Jesus: “Go, teach all nations. Baptise them in the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit” (Matt.28:19), he comments in words of great depth and meaning:

“All is ordered according to the powers and the qualities of the divine Persons:
one and only all- powerful Being from whom everything comes forth,
one and only Begotten through whom everything exists,
one and only Gift, source of perfect hope.
Nothing is missing to such perfection which embraces in
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, immensity in the Eternal One,
revelation in the Image, fulfilment in the Gift.” (Tr.II,1)

The expression adopted by Hilary: “species in imagine” - revelation in the image - or “the seeing of God in the image”, opens interesting perspectives on his vision of the mystery of the Son at the heart of the mystery of God Trinity.

-What do we understand by the term “image”?

The first meaning of this word (in Greek, icon, translated into Latin by imago) has the overall nuance of representation, reproduction, figure.²³ It is in this sense that Hilary uses it when he borrows his example from the domain of the artist. In painting or sculpture, whatever may be the material, the colour or the style, the image reproduces the aspect of the beings that it represented, but the reproduction is not perfect, it is not alike in every point to the living beings which served as models. (Tr.VII,37) Starting from this concrete example, Hilary wants to make the reader understand that the Son, born of God, is not an image like those that artists try to reproduce.

²³ Ceslas SPICQ, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, Fribourg, Cerf, 1981

The term “image” implies also a relationship of origin and of dependence.²⁴ When Hilary declares that the Son is the living image of the living God, he puts the emphasis on the equality, the identity of nature between the Father and the Son. Because the same undivided nature exists in them, in the mystery of his birth, the only Son shows in himself God the Father. (Tr.VII,37)

The dialogue of Jesus with Philip allows Hilary to bring a new light on the theme of image, even if this theme is not used explicitly in John’s Gospel:

“Now that you have known me, you will know my Father also.
From now on you do know him and you see him.
Philip said to him: Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.
Jesus replied: For such a long time I have been with you, and you don’t
know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14: 7 – 9)

In the group of disciples, Philip expresses the desire which, since Moses, pierces through all the Old Testament: to see God and to know God. For the Semite, to know encompasses much more than intellectual or abstract knowledge. To know expresses an existential relationship, to know someone is to enter into relationship with him. To see is the first stage in this knowledge: the disciples see the man Jesus of Nazareth; they have before their eyes the exterior aspect of him, his body of flesh, subject to all the limitations of the human condition; they know him; they have lived in close proximity with him. Sight and touch are the means of knowing which precede the faith. This is what Thomas was demanding in order to recognize in the crucified one, Christ risen: “If I don’t see the mark of the nails, if I don’t put my hand in his side, I will not believe.” (John 20: 24)

-How is it that knowing him, the Christ, is also knowing the Father?

Jesus invites his disciples to go to another level, that of faith which does not depend on a human judgment founded on tangible means of knowing, sight and touch, but which is rooted in the power of his Word and of his witness. They are to recognize, in the truth of his being, the very one who speaks to them and whom they see. They see a man and this man says he is Son of God; he testifies that to know him is to know the Father. (Tr.VII,35)

Hilary makes clear the different levels in the movement of coming to faith of the disciples: they have seen, they see Jesus and they must see the divine. They have to move from one to the other of these levels in order to recognize, in faith, “the divine nature, which is in him and of which they have, in a very recent past, seen the effects.” (Tr.VII,34) In emphasising the use of the near future tense: “soon you will know him”, Hilary remarks that “the moment when one sees him is separate from the moment when one recognizes him.” Tr.VII,34) The disciples have to discern, through all the signs of which they have been witnesses, that Jesus is unveiling to them the presence of the invisible God. Jesus, the Son, is not another God, he is in his being the unique God. Hilary, in the line of the Council of Nicaea, forcefully affirms “the unity (fundamental) between God and his human face, Jesus.”²⁵ They have to come to understand, in faith, that to know him, himself, is to know the Father: “Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father”. He makes visible the One whom no one can see.

²⁴ Ibid (Greek), p.428 ss

²⁵ C.DUQUOC, *different God*, Cerf, 1978, p.31 – 36

-How can he, who is visible, be the image of the invisible God?

The invisible and infinite God cannot be represented under the image of a limited form, so Hilary specifies: “It is not his body of flesh, brought to birth by Mary, which would lead the apostles to contemplate in him the form and the image of God; and the totally exterior aspect of the humanity taken on by the Son, does not allow them to see, as on a “screen”, the nature of the disembodied God.” (Tr.VII,37)

In order to affirm the divinity of the Son, Hilary relies on the relationship which unites in one and the same likeness two distinct Persons, the Father and the Son. To say that the Son resembles the Father is to give to the “image” the meaning of a model, a replica. Born of the living God, the Son is transparent to the mystery of his Father, he does not reflect the image of a nature outside himself, but the same undivided nature in the Father and in the Son. In his humanity, the Son makes visible the glory of the One whom none can see; he is the visible representation, the form and “the image of the invisible God”. (Col.1,15) By the mystery of his birth before the creation of the world, from all eternity, the Son is the spiritual and perfect likeness of the Father.

Starting from this theme of image, Hilary goes still deeper, he associates image and sonship, thus implicitly underlining the relational character of the image. In the light of the text of Gen. 1:26, explains P. Buhler, “designate the human being as image of God is to set up between God and the human a relationship of person to person, a relationship of “vis-à-vis”....of face to face, and this relationship is, in a special manner, a relationship of dialogue”.²⁶ Now this existential relationship between God and the human being, is not only a reflection of the relationship of communion which exists between the Father and the Son. God is a being of language, and only the Word of God can underpin human language when we have to present the mystery of God whose depth is beyond human reason. And “the language of God does not allow us to understand a solitary God”, says Hilary, nor two persons who are unlike, since it is by the Son that one sees the Father,..... they are One and not one unique person.” (Tr.VII,38) When Christ says, “Who has seen me, has seen the Father”, he means that it is by the Son that one sees the Father, because “the one who is born and the one who brings to birth are One in all truth.” (Tr.VII,39)

That he is the image proves that, in his birth, God the only Son shows in himself God the Father. We see the Father through the Son and in the Son, revelation in the image”, revelation of the invisible God, since in him are at the same time the nature and the Name of God. He is the living image of the nature of the Living one; he is so identical with the Father in his being and his power that his work and his word are those of the Father.

²⁶ P.Buhler, Human in the Image of God. Collective work Labor et Fides, 1989,p.273

B. BORN AND SENT

After seeing how Hilary of Poitiers does his utmost to prove, in the light of Scripture, that the Son is God, born of God, living God born of the living God, image of the invisible God, in the perfect equality of nature which he receives from the mystery of his birth, we need now to specify the meaning of the mission of the Son, born and sent, born and incarnate.

1. “COME FORTH” FROM GOD AND “COME”

Hilary lays out the essence of his reflection, in the sixth Book of On the Trinity, starting from the text of John, in one of those polemical discussions in which Jesus is opposed to the Jews. The person of Jesus is, for the Jews, an enigma. To their question: “Who are you?” Jesus replies: “I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own authority, but he sent me.” (John 8: 42) “Ego enim processi et veni”. Hilary questions himself: “I wonder: What is the meaning of: I came from God? On the one hand there is: “ex Deo Processi”, I came from God, and on the other “Veni”, “now I have come”?

- “Come Forth from God”.

The two expressions are not synonymous: “A Patre enim venisse et ex Deo exisse non est significationis eiusdem”. (Tr.VI,30) Hilary explains that the word “come forth, “procedere” or “exisse” is used in the text of John’s Gospel to indicate an “incorporeal birth.” It is by his birth and not by his coming that the Son is from God: “Ex Deo”. The Son is from the Father not by an act of creative power, like all the other creatures which in the same way come from God through the action of his power, but he comes forth by the truth of his birth. In the Gospel text, “birth” and “coming” are specified so that we can distinguish, in the most perfect truth, the particular meaning of these words. The sonship of Christ is unique and entirely different from any other”. (Tr.VI,31)

“Ex Deo exisse”, come forth from God, is to exist through a divine birth. The “coming forth from the Father” cannot be mixed up with the “coming”, since Christ himself, after speaking of his coming forth from God, recalls his coming from the Father into the world. “Where would the greatness of our faith be, our faith which proclaims Jesus Christ Son of God, wonders Hilary, if he is only Son by name, without being Son by nature?” The Christ, in speaking of himself as “born and sent” makes the distinction between his “coming forth” from God and his coming from the Father. The structure of the Latin phrase shows clearly the distinction between his “being of God” and his mission:

“Cum aliud sit a Deo in substantiam natiuitate exisse aliud est a Patre in hunc mundum ad consummanda salutis nostrae sacramenta venisse “ (Tr.VI,31. 156.c)

It is one thing to come forth from God in the substance of birth, it is another to come into this world, by the Father, to accomplish the signs of the mystery of our Salvation. Hilary affirms thus that the “being of God” of the Son is not identical with his mission. “His “coming forth” or procession (exitio) shows what is the Christ; his mission, on the contrary, concerns the economy of Salvation.”²⁷

²⁷ P.Smolders, *The Trinitarian Doctrine of St Hilary of Poitiers*, Rome *Analecta Gregoriana*, 1944, p.136-137.

-An appeal to witnesses

Among the many witnesses to whom Hilary appeals in order to strengthen his case and reaffirm the divine origin of the Son, he puts in first place the witness of the Father at the moment of the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:17) and of the transfiguration (Matt.17:5). He emphasises the importance of the pronouns in the Father's declaration: "This is my beloved Son", and questions his reader: "Don't you think that in presenting him with the words "This one is", he wants to tell us this: I have given others the title of son, but this one is MY Son, my own Son". (Tr.VI,23) To the Father's witness, there is the echo of the Son's witness, the Son who calls God his Father and states that "No one knows the Son, except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son..." (Matt.11: 27) Their mutual witness, the importance of which we can grasp, will be something to be developed later on.²⁸ At this stage of our reflection, we will restrict ourselves to the witness of the apostles whose journey in faith is an example for us.

The disciples have lived in close friendship with Jesus; they have been witnesses of his works carried out with power that surpasses human powers; why are they so slow to realize the meaning of what their master has been saying? Hilary speaks directly to them, those who have been the eyewitnesses of the works that only God is capable of carrying out:

"And yet you saw the water of the wedding feast become wine... you broke the five loaves to feed an enormous crowd.... you saw dumb people recover their ability to speak, the eyes of the blind discover the light..... dead people come back to life. And Lazarus....truly alive before your eyes..." (Tr.VI,33)

Eyewitnesses, they saw, and they heard the Christ say over and over again that he was sent by God. They knew of his mission and yet they had not understood that to have come from God" is not the same as to be "Sent by God". According to John's Gospel, it is only at the moment of Jesus farewell talks with them, when he declares: "I came forth from God and have come into the world..." (John 16,28) that the disciples understand, for the first time, the mystery of the origin of the Christ:

"We see now that you know everything and that you don't need anyone to question you. From this we believe that you have come forth from God." (John 16:30)

This expression "I came from God" suddenly strikes them. They hear something new which stimulates their faith response: "From this we believe that you have come from God." It is hearing an unexpected statement which confirms their faith, emphasises Hilary (Tr. VI,34). The truth of the being of the Christ, Son of God, come from God, jumps out of "the mist of enigmas", in Hilary's words, and this truth makes them put their faith into words. (Tr.VI,33-34)

²⁸ cf. Chapter III. The Father and the Son, One in the communion of the Spirit.

-A special witness: Peter

Faced with those who hold the Arian heretical belief that the Son of God is son by name and not by nature, Hilary, anxious to teach a faith true to the Gospel and to the witness of the apostles, appeals to Peter who takes first place among the witnesses of Jesus' life and mission. The episode of Peter's profession of faith at Caesarea is a key text where Hilary will find support. He begins from Peter's reply to the decisive question Jesus put to his disciples for the first time: "Who do people say I am?"

To the question formulated in the third person, the disciples gave various opinions from people outside their own group: for some of them John the Baptist, for others Elijah...

Jesus pushes them: "but for **yourselves**, who am I?", for you and not for the others. Peter speaks in the name of the group: "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt.16:16)

If the Christ were not Son, come from God, why, wonders Hilary, would he proclaim Peter blessed for having given such a reply? Peter was aware of the Christ's mission; he had heard him say several times that he had been sent by the Father. But "Peter puts forward a word which had not yet been pronounced by a human voice: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Tr.VI,36)

"You are the Christ". In giving him this title, Peter is referring to a traditional title in the Old Testament: The Messiah, promised and awaited by Israel for generations. He makes the link between the person of Jesus and the meaning of the title of Messiah. This recognition is expressed in a personal dialogue: "You are" – You and no other – "You are the Christ", such a declaration emphasises the unique identity of Jesus, and, by rooting it in the history of Israel "makes it equivalent to his "own name", with the meaning of the title : Jesus is Christ, identifying his meaning, his "function", his mission.²⁹

To the profession of the Messiahship of Jesus, reported also by Luke and Mark, Matthew adds that of the divine sonship: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Hilary has followed the tradition of Matthew and declares that, not only has Peter recognized Jesus the Christ, he believes, he proclaims him Son of God. He lets his faith speak; he publicly puts forward the truth of the divine nature in Christ. (Tr. VI,36)

If the Christ proclaims Peter blessed, it is not for having given him a title and honoured him, but it is for having revealed his mystery. It is not Peter's subjective interpretation, but the human witness of faith professed. As Thomas, in the presence of Christ, recognized his Lord and his God, so also Peter recognizes in Jesus of Nazareth the divinity of the Christ, by proclaiming him Son of God. This profession of faith does not depend on human proofs: "It is not flesh and blood.", it is a gift of the revelation from the Father. 'To call the Christ Son of

²⁹ L.Panier, Jesus the Christ by more than one title, in *Lumiere et Vie* No.175 Lyon 1985, p 65

God, and believe him to be that, is a hidden mystery which can only be revealed by God.” (Tr. VI,36)

This faith proclaimed by Peter is the foundation of the Church, Hilary attests, “she cannot go wrong in affirming the Christ created from nothing, but she proclaims him Son of God, according to the nature which he possesses in himself.” (Tr.VI,37) She recognizes in him the glory of divine birth.

2. BORN AND INCARNATE

In referring to the prologue of John’s Gospel, Hilary presents the Son in the mystery of his birth, manifested under the name of Word, the very Word of God. “Come forth from God”, he belongs always to the Being of God, he is God from all eternity. And this Word which was with God in the beginning without beginning, has entered into human history: “The Word was made flesh” (John 1:14) “Yes, the Word which was made flesh is none other than God”, affirms Hilary. (Tr.VII,9) By this affirmation which expresses his personal conviction and the faith of the Church, he introduces the event of the coming of the Word in our flesh.

In order to deepen, in listening to Hilary, the meaning of the mission of the incarnate Word, our reflection will move around two axes which seem essential: “the body of flesh” and the incarnate Word.

- “The body of flesh”

The expression “the body of flesh” that Hilary uses, many times, in On the Trinity, is used by Paul in his letter to the Colossians (Col.1:22); in Latin: “in corpore carnis eius”. If we replace these terms in the biblical context, we notice that where the Hebrew language uses only one term: *basar*, the Greek uses two words. To say of the human being that he is “flesh”, is to characterise the human by the exterior, corporal aspect. The flesh fashioned by God (Gen. 2:7) is worthy of respect; for the Semite, it designates the human being in his/her concrete totality. In the New Testament writings, and particularly in St Paul, to designate the concrete human being by flesh is to recognize his/her dignity, but it evokes also the idea of limit, of fragility.³⁰

In the mystery of his incarnation, Jesus the Christ has taken on a body of flesh. In quoting the text of Paul: “...he has reconciled us in his body of flesh by giving it up to death” (Col.1:22), Hilary recalls the realism of this rootedness of the Son of God in our human condition. “He became flesh of our flesh”, he has taken on a bodily condition marked by humility.” (Tr.VI,25) The faith of the Church, Hilary says forcefully, the true faith which is the blessing of the believer consists in “proclaiming the Christ God and human, recognizing the Word made flesh, not refusing to see God because he became human, not “conjuring away” the flesh because it is that of the Word.” (Tr.IX,3) While Arius, in the name of God’s transcendence, could not accept that God in person submit to the changes and humiliations of human life and death, Hilary, on the contrary, in contemplating this indescribable mystery, proclaims his faith in saying to the Father:

³⁰ Vocabulary of Biblical Theology, Cerf, Paris, 1970 – art.” flesh” 148 -150 – art. “body” 210 ss.

“Your Son, the Unique Child, come forth from you, God-Unborn, was born human of the Virgin to accomplish the mystery of our Salvation; truly begotten by you, he has you in Himself and you hold him, remaining in you by the nature that you give him in this birth.”. (Tr.VI,19)

To recognize thus that the Son of God, existing before all time, became flesh in being born bodily of a woman, Mary, is to reveal one’s human condition in all its realism.³¹ And this word of “flesh” does not only apply to the first moment of the incarnation, but to his entire existence: “in his coming to birth, his passion, his death, he entered into the realities which are the conditions of our nature”. (Tr. IX,7) Word incarnate, the Christ lives in all truth his existence in the limits of the human condition.

The Christ, Word incarnate, is fully human and fully God. In several places, Hilary quotes the text from Paul: “In Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.” (Col.:8-9) (bodily: corporaliter). He remains true God and perfectly God, while being fully in a body, not in part but totally. (Tr.VIII,53) In the ninth Book of On the Trinity, the way Hilary speaks about the mystery of the incarnate Word reaches a remarkable depth: “This divine nature which dwells in him has welcomed in itself the poverty of an earthly birth, and it is in the humble aspect of the flesh which he has taken that this divine nature puts into action the power belonging to his divinity.” (Tr. IX,51)

Such a mystery reveals the dignity of the human condition. Hilary is not afraid to put the emphasis on the flesh: “The divinity took up its dwelling in the heart of humanity in order to transfigure the human by the divine, the visible by the invisible. God is born in order to take on Godself our flesh.” (Tr.IX,7) Already, at the beginning of his treatise, we can notice the force of the formulas used by Hilary: “It is we who needed God to make Godself flesh and dwell among us, that is to say, that God make God’s dwelling in the very interior of our flesh, by taking into Godself the flesh which is the unique flesh of everyone.” (Tr.II,25) “God the Word became flesh, in order that, through the Word of God made flesh, the flesh itself would be lifted up to the Word of God.” (Tr.I,11) We could sum up his thought in this way: “It is by the contact with the flesh that we enter into the mystery of God.”³²

Carrying out his mission in obedience and love, the Christ born as man, stripped of his “Godly form” – “forma Dei” -, taking on the condition of a slave, recognized as man by his appearance” (Phil. 2:6-8), at the end of his annihilation as far as the obedience of the Cross, receives “the **NAME** which is above every name” (Phil.2,9) Hilary comments thus on this hymn:

“It is because God the Word possesses the nature of God that the Word made flesh is, in his turn, in God’s nature; the man Jesus is in “the Glory of God the Father” (Phil.2,11) because the flesh is united to the Glory of the Word.” (Tr.IX,38)

The Son has glorified all humanity in taking on human flesh. “His abasement is our nobility, his humiliation our glory. Here is God in the flesh and here are we, in return, reborn in God by means of the flesh.” (Tr.II,25) Through him, the flesh enters into this mystery of the glory of the Word.

³¹ In Book X, 15 – 17: Hilary presents this mystery of the bodily birth of the Son of Mary with a great deal of realism.

³² M.J.Le Guillou, op cit. p.93

-The Word enfleshed

By taking on a “body of flesh”, the Word of God, the divine Word is made human word. As L. Panier writes: “To speak of the incarnation, is to designate at the same time, in the filial humanity of Jesus, the flesh and its connection to the word which names the Son of God.”³³

The human being is a being of language, and the word is heard in a body. “The body is the link between the flesh and language, and it is in this link of flesh and tongue that we consider a human being as a subject who speaks.”³⁴ This brief anthropological note that we can summarize in a concise phrase: to be human is to speak, will lead our reflection on the mystery of the very Word of God become, in Jesus, human word, in order to reveal the Father (John 1:18) because he is the only one who truly knows the Father. (Matt.11,27)

Hilary states in several places, basing himself on the Prologue of John’s Gospel, that “the Word is a personal reality and not simply a sound, a nature and not a speech. He is God and not a being without stability.” (Tr.II,15) In God, the word is a person. When the Christ declares: “The words that I say to you, I don’t say them from myself” (John14:10), he means that the Father speaks through his mouth, and yet it is very much himself who speaks.” (Tr.VII,40) “The Father expresses himself by the words of the Son, acts in the action of the Son; all that the Son does and says, the Father does it and says it in the Son”, comments Hilary. (Tr.VIII,52)

“God speaks from a real body, from a body of word.”³⁵ When Hilary wants to make his listener or reader think, he questions him: “And if you ask me who can it be who dwells in his body, understand who it is that speaks, who is seen in the one that you see, who acts in the one you see at work. Grasp God in God, the All born from the All.... recognize thus that it is the fullness of the divinity in the body of Christ.” (Tr.VIII,56)

In the ninth Book, Hilary pursues his reflection on the mystery of the incarnate Word. Believe that the Christ is Son of God, and recognize him son of man, is to admit that, as a man, “he has spoken to us and has carried out all that belongs to God, speaking to us as God and accomplishing all that concerns human beings. He has done this in such a way that this very language, under its two aspects, might appear always word of man and word of God.” (Tr.IX,5) Because the Son, Word incarnate, “is fully human and fully God, it is normal, in Hilary’s eyes, that “the mystery of his words would be in harmony with the mystery of his way of existing”. (Tr.IX,6) “Human by our flesh, he has spoken to us like a man, he has not hidden from us that he is God by nature.”(Tr.IX,7)

Jesus, Word made flesh, “becomes for us “the ‘exegete’ of God”, according to the expression of B. Sesboue referring to John 1”⁸ (in Latin: enarravit), in other words, the translator into the language of human existence of the divine word in pure form.”³⁶ In him, the invisible and inaccessible Father can be heard:

³³ L.Panier, *The Birth of the son of God*. Cerf Paris,1991, p 339

³⁴ *ibid.* p 340

³⁵ *ibid.* p351

³⁶ B Sesboue, *Jesus-Christ, The One Mediator* Desclee Paris 1988, p 105

“I would ask you: where has the Father been heard? Where has the Father taught those who listened? It is the Son that we hear and who teaches; listening to the teaching of the Son must be understood as listening to the teaching of the Father.” (Tr.IX,49)

Instead of speaking of the “teaching of the Father”, as Hilary does, we would rather say that the Christ, Son of God, Word incarnate, is at the same time revelation and communication of God to human beings. “The fatherhood of God is revealed because there is, in the humanity of Jesus-Christ, the connection of the flesh and the word, connection which makes him Son.”³⁷

The event of the birth of the Son which, in Hilary’s eyes, contains at the same time the name and the nature, the power and the revelation of God, has opened for us new perspectives on the mystery of Jesus-Christ, God born of God. Because he is the Son “come from God”, perfect image of the invisible God, his life is total revelation of God. Fully God and fully human, he is the incarnate word in a “body of flesh”. Through the humanity of the Word, not only does God speak, but the word is enfleshed: “If we believe in the one God has sent, we will hear the voice of God, we will see the face of God and God’s word will live in those who believe.” (Tr.IX,21)

By taking as the basis of our reflection, the incarnation of the word, we propose to go further into the discovery of the mystery of God Trinity, in the life of relationship between the Father and the Son, which is communion in the Spirit.

THIRD CHAPTER

THE FATHER AND THE SON ONE IN THE COMMUNION OF THE SPIRIT

We have followed the approach of Hilary of Poitiers who, starting from the themes of the Name and of the Birth, is able to state that the Christ is true Son, in virtue of his true birth; true Son of God, he is also true God. He underlines also the equality of nature that only generation can confer. Now “the equality of such a nature can be found neither in a solitary God, nor in a duality of gods, since all equality could not be either different or solitary”. (Tr.VII,15)

By this affirmation, Hilary comes back to the theological question which he posed at the beginning of Book VII of On the Trinity: “How to understand that God not be alone, if God is One”? He calls on our intelligence “to recognize that a birth according to nature supposes equality and that, where there is equality, there could be neither one being alone, nor two gods foreign to one another.” (Tr.VII,16)

But reason would not be enough to penetrate the mystery of the sonship and of the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus-Christ. If Jesus-Christ, Word incarnate, is Word of God, we have to find support in his own witness. Listening to this word, manifested in him, will lead us, firstly, to deepen the meaning of the mission of the Son sent by his Father in order to accomplish God’s work. Then we will see how the mission of the Word made flesh in Jesus-

³⁷ L Panier op.cit. p 349

Christ reveals to us the intimate relationship which unites the Father and the Son in the communion of the Spirit.

A THE WORK OF THE SON IS THE WORK OF THE FATHER

To recognize, in the light of the Gospel, the truth of the birth of the Son of God, is to discover a new dimension of this mystery: the power of God at work in Him, the One Sent from the Father. If someone is still inclined to doubt the truth of the divine sonship of Christ, Hilary would invite you to listen to the testimony of Christ himself who calls “God his own Father, thus making himself the equal of God” (John 5:15) Chapter 5 of John’s Gospel will serve as the basis of Hilary’s theological reflection.

1.THE SOURCE OF THE SON’S ACTION

In order to properly understand the meaning of the discussion between Jesus and the Jews reported in John 5.19-23, let us put it in its context. Jesus has just acted to heal a sick person at the Pool of Bethesda and told the man to pick up his mat, on a Sabbath day. Jesus breaks the law which forbids one to carry a burden on the day when every believing Jew must imitate the resting of the Creator. Now Jesus declares that he is imitating his Father: “My Father is always working, and I also am at work.” (John 5: 17) He puts his work at the level of God’s work. What rouses the anger of the Jews, comments John, is not only the fact that he has violated the Sabbath, but it is because, in calling God his own Father, he thus made himself “the equal of God”.³⁸ The speech which follows is mainly about the divine sonship and equality with God, and this aspect is what Hilary holds onto.

-One and the same nature, one and the same power

Christ Jesus is conscious of possessing the same nature and the same power as his Father. He does not object to being spoken of as equal to God, he invites recognition of the work of the Father in what he carries out himself. His work is the work of the Father in him. He solemnly proclaims it:

“Truly, truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but only what he sees the Father doing.” (John 5:19)

In these words, the Christ reveals that the power coming from the Father’s nature is in him: a nature which used its power to work on the Sabbath day. For him,” the healing of the paralysed man does not overthrow the law”³⁹, for the Father acts through the action of the Son. The use of the present tense in the Johannine text: the Father is at work (operatur) and I also am at work (operor) underlines the simultaneous nature of the action of the Father and the Son. “Jesus admits that he “works” on this day as his Father “works”. “The Sabbath brings into play the relationship of Jesus, as Son, with the Father.”⁴⁰. “The moment when the Father acts coincides with the time when the Son acts, and what is done by the Father is done also by the

³⁸ P.Beauchamp underlines the shrewdness of the adversary who has been able to bring together the transgression of the Sabbath and that which the serpent suggested in the garden of Eden: “Make oneself like God”. Cf L’Un et L’Autre Testament p 312

³⁹ Ibid. Tome II, p 311

⁴⁰ P Beauchamp, op.cit. p 311

Son”, comments Hilary. “If the Father is working at this same moment, the work of the Father is fulfilled at the instant when the Son speaks.” (Tr.IX,44)

We are therefore in the presence of two distinct persons and not of one unique person. However, the work of the Son must not be considered as a simple reproduction of what the Father would ask him to carry out. The Father does not give the Son pre-determined works. When Jesus declares: “All that the Father does, the Son does in the same way” (similiter) (John 5:19), this is not a confession of powerlessness, but refers to the very source of the power which comes to him from his nature, from his perfect birth as Son. The one whose nature has the power to do the same things as the Father, possesses the same nature as the Father. “In the God who works, you see the divine nature at work.” (Tr.VII,21)

-The sharing of knowledge

The structure of the speech, in John 5, by the frequent repetition of the couple Father-Son, around the key-word : to do, puts the spotlight on the parallel between the activity of the Father and that of the Son. The “doing” of the Son does not come from a “power of acting due to a development of the powers which would have been granted him for the action, but this power of acting is the fruit of the knowledge that the Son has of the Father.” (Tr.VII,17) And this knowledge is love: “For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything that he does” (John 5,20). The Son acts in the love which unites him to the Father.

It is in this love that the Son knows the works that the Father wants to accomplish through him, the One he has Sent. In this shared knowledge, there is a true identity between the work of the Father and the work of the Son. (Tr.VII,19) The Father shows him everything he does. Through the mystery of his birth, the Son has in himself everything which is from the Father. The nature and the power of the Father are in the Son: “natura et virtus Patris esset in Filio”. (Tr.VII,22. 193B) The Son has access to the fullness of life, and it is this fullness of life that he gives.

-The hand of the Father is the hand of the Son.

The symbol of the hand, borrowed from the text of John 10:27-30, allows Hilary to explain in a concrete way, to his reader, the equality of power in the Father and the Son.

“My sheep listen to my voice and I myself know them; they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never perish, and no one will take them out of my hand.” (John 10:27 -28)

If Irenaeus uses the image of the hand as symbol of the creative activity of God who, in the beginning, had modelled human beings in his own image and likeness (Gen. 2:7), “by the hands of the Father, in other words, by the Son and by the Spirit”⁴¹, Hilary, for his part, holds on to the idea of power and protection that the Johannine text evokes: “No one will take them out of my hand.” Jesus is conscious of his power, he bears witness to himself and, with authority, can declare: “**My** sheep listen to **my** voice, and **I myself** know them”. The use of the first person is significant. No earthly force has the power to supplant the power of Christ in his mission of Shepherd.

Verse 29 echoes the preceding verse by establishing a parallel between the hand of the Father and the hand of the Son:

⁴¹ Irenaeus of Lyon, Against Heresies (v.6, 11 – v.15,2)

“My Father, what he has given me is greater than everything,⁴² And no one has the power to take something from the hand of the Father.”

Why, then, what is not taken from the hand of the Son can also not be taken from the hand of the Father? Hilary questions his reader: “You ask me why? Listen: “I and the Father are One.” (John 10:30) The hand of the Father is the hand of the Son. The nature and the power of the Father are in the Son.” (Tr.VII,22)

In the light of this commentary, we can say, then, that the action of one is totally engaged in. the action of the other. Now we must specify how, concretely, the power of the Son, the One Sent by the Father is revealed through the mission of Christ, Word of God made flesh.

2.THE MISSION OF THE SON

The truth of a one and identical nature is at the source of the power of the Father and of the Son; untiringly, Hilary has repeated this affirmation which he explains thus: “The one whose nature has the power to do the same things as the Father, possesses the same nature as the Father.” (Tr.VII,18) Jesus-Christ, in the concrete reality of his mission, bears witness himself, with authority, of the total power that the Father has given him, in the matter of judgment, of life and of resurrection. In his mission as Sent, he is the voice, the face of the Father.

-The power to give life

God is life, and the living God has power to give life. After stating that the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does, Jesus declares:

“He will show him even greater works than these, you will be astonished by them. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes.” (John 5:20-21)

As the Father has power to give life, he shows the Son how to give life. The healing of the crippled man is a sign of this power at work in the Christ, and, at the same time, an appeal to believe in the one who has received from the Father the power to give life. A study of the vocabulary and of the structure of the Greek text shed light in particular on the work of the Son which is work of life.

The Greek words chosen underline clearly the equality of power in one as in the other and add force to what Jesus is saying here. Jesus claims therefore that, just as the Father is source of life, so also he, the Son, in being born to life of the living God, has in himself the power to “do”, to create, to give life.

All that the Father has, he has given it to the Son, as to an “equal Son”⁴³ “The power of one is equal to the power of the other, as follows from the unity of an identical nature.” (Tr.VII,19) Eternal Word, he possesses life from all eternity; Word of life, he has total access to the source

⁴² There exist some variants in the Greek text of v.29:

... My Father who gave them (the sheep) to me is greater than I am

... My Father, what he has given me....

⁴³ P. Beauchamp, op.cit. p 313

of life. The Christ attests, without a shadow of a doubt, says Hilary, that he enjoys a freedom of nature which allows him to dispose of life, since he can make come alive whomever he wishes.

In the meeting of Jesus with the cripple, we can notice that the word and the healing go together: “And immediately the man was healed.” (Jn5:9) The force of the word of the Son transmits life. Thus, Jesus can state solemnly:

“Truly, truly, I tell you, the time is coming, and actually is now that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it will live.” (Jn 5:25)

In the Greek text, the repetition of the word “hear” lights up, in the centre of the verse, the expression “the voice of the Son of God”.

The Word of God is this voice which finds all its strength in Jesus. He can state that the time is coming, and is in fact now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God.⁴⁴ The word of the Son gives life. Jesus has just healed the crippled man; this healing is not only bodily but calls to a new life: “Now you are healed, don’t sin anymore.” (John 5:14)

“This action is founded only on the power of resurrection which comes to him from the Father as to an “equal” Son”.⁴⁵ If the power of one is equal to the power of the other, as follows from the unity of an identical nature, this equality does not abolish differences. The Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Father. The Father is the origin. The work of the Father cannot be other than that equivalent with his Name of Father: to give life. The Son, in the mystery of his birth, receives from the Father the power to make alive. As Hilary comments: “They tell us that the works of the Father have been shown to the Son, and not that his nature has been given an additional power, in order to allow him to carry out divine works. In this way, we are taught that in this revelation of the works of the Father lies the substance of the Birth of the Son, in whom, by the love of the Father, the knowledge of the works that the Father wants to do through him is innate.” (Tr.VII,19)

-The power to judge

If the power of the Son reveals the power of the Father, as source of life and resurrection, it is also manifested in the matter of judgement, another aspect of the mission of the Son. The Christ himself affirms that he has received the power of “judging”.

“...so the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. (John 5:21)

For the Father does not judge anyone, He has given judgment entirely to the Son.” (John5:22)

In the text of John, we can note a strong connection linking v.22 to the preceding verse, so establishing a link between the gift of life and judgment. We are not here doing an exegetical analysis of this passage of John’s Gospel. What takes Hilary’s attention is especially the fact that the Father hands over all judgment to the Son, and this is for him the proof of the divine nature and birth of the Son. “Only a nature identical to the divine nature can have everything, and the Son can possess nothing which has not been given him.” (Tr.VII,20) That does not

⁴⁴ Cf. T.O.B. Note b. the “dead” designates also those who are cut off from God, who are dead before the Word which could make them live again.

⁴⁵ P.Beauchamp, op.cit. p 313. Note 9

mean that the Father is deprived of the power to judge, for the judgment of the Son comes from the judgment of the Father, but the mission of the Son is brought to the foreground. If the Son has received the power to judge, it is because he is Son of man, because he shares totally in the human condition. (Jn 5:26)

The power of judging given to the Son is not so much a sentence of condemnation as a revelation of life. For those who listen to his Word and believe in Jesus, the One Sent by the Father, there is no judgment, but a passage from death to life. (Jn 5:24)

The reason for this power given to the Son is explained in the text from John:

“All judgment has been given to the Son, in order that all might honour the Son as they honour the Father. The person who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.” (Jn 5:22-23)

The equality of honour implies an equality of nature: only beings identical in nature are worthy of equal honour. We can notice that, in this verse, the Son is named first. The glory of God is the glory of Christ. The Son must be honoured as much as the Father because he is the One Sent from the Father and One with him.

-The One Sent from the Father

Someone sent does not come of themselves; they are mandated by another, and their mission only has meaning **if** it represents the one who sends them. Jesus-Christ is the One Sent from the Father. He himself states this: “I, I know him because I am with the Father and it is the Father who has sent me.” (Jn 7:29) The sending of the Son by the Father recurs like a “leitmotif” all through John’s Gospel; therefore, it is not surprising that the theological discussion of Hilary is based on this gospel, and especially on the witness that Jesus himself gives about his own mission:

“If God were your Father, you would love me because it is from God that I have come out; I have not come of myself, but God has sent me.” (Jn 8:42)

As we saw before⁴⁶, Hilary establishes a distinction between the terms “come forth” and “come”. The “coming forth” from the Father cannot be confused with the “coming”. “Come forth” from God and “come” from God are not synonymous. Come forth from God, is to exist by a divine birth; the expression “come” from the Father takes on a salvific meaning: “Jesus comes in order to accomplish the mystery of our Salvation”. (Tr.VI,31)

The mission of the Son is rooted in the mystery of his birth and of his unity with the Father. Jesus says of himself that he is “born and sent”: “... Because I am with him and it is he who sent me.” (John 7:29) (Tr.VI,29) In the ninth Book of On the Trinity, Hilary takes up again the discourse of Chapter 5, the text of John’s Gospel which teaches as clearly as possible the meaning of the mission of Christ Jesus who can proclaim with authority that his witness is preferable to that of John the Baptist:

“John was the lamp which burns and lights up....For myself, I have something better than the witness of John, because the works that the Father has given me to carry out these same works of mine bear witness that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me bears witness to me.” (Jn 5:35-37)

⁴⁶ Cf Chapter II B Born and Sent 1. “Come Forth” from God and “Come” p 26

All Jesus' activity is conditioned by the fact that he is the One Sent of the Father; everything that he does, everything he says, is in order to carry out the mission entrusted to him by the Father. His works attest that he is the supreme "Emissary of God". This witness has weight, because no one other than the Son sent from the Father could carry out such works: work of judgment, work of life and of resurrection. But more than the witness of his works, what must become apparent through them is the witness of the Father himself. "Since the work of Christ is the witness of the Father, we have to conclude, specifies Hilary, that the nature which is at work in the Christ is precisely that same nature by which the Father is also his witness." (Tr.IX,20) The faith that the Christ, Son of God, asks for, is a faith in his mission. That includes, all together, faith in the Son as the One Sent and faith in the Father who sends him, without confusion of Persons.

If Jesus can say to the Jews who surround him: "You have never heard his voice, you have never seen his face, and his word does not live in you, since you do not believe in the one that he has sent." (Jn 5:37-38), it is because he is himself the human voice and face of God. He is the living proof of the existence of the Father who sent him. So, Hilary can explain what faith in Jesus, Son of God, is: "If one believes in him, one will hear the voice of God, one will see his face and his word will dwell in those who believe. For, because of the unity of their nature, it is the Father who, in the Son, is heard, seen and possessed." (Tr.IX,21)

The Son in his divinity is the One Sent of the Father. Inasmuch as he is sent, he is the voice of the Father, Word made flesh. Hilary asks his reader: "Where has the Father been heard? Where has he taught those who were listening? But no one sees the Father, except the one who comes from God. How could one hear the one who is unseen?... Now it is the one who hears the Father who comes to the Son. And since it is the Son that one hears and who teaches, he thus shows us that he possesses in himself the nature which properly belongs to the Father who speaks and who teaches." (Tr. IX,49)

To listen to the voice of the Son, the One Sent of the Father, to welcome the Word of God, is, finally, to believe in him, the Son, in his mission and in the message of Salvation that he brings from the Father's part. In a formula whose "parallelism" strongly underlines the perfect unity between the Father and the One Sent, Hilary concludes: "...he (the Son) shows us, under what is characteristic of an identical divine nature, at the same time, the One who sends him and himself, the One Sent, since he shows us that his will, his action and his language are the desire, the works and the words of his Father." (Tr.IX,49)

The mission of the Son, only way towards the Father, thus opens us to the mystery of the intimate life of God who is **COMMUNION**.

B THE MYSTERY OF COMMUNION IN GOD TRINITY

The mission of Jesus, the Son of God, sent by the Father, bears witness to his intimate union with the Father. At the source of all that he says and does, there is the presence of the Father of whom he himself is vividly conscious, when he declares: "I and the Father, we are One." (Jn 10:30) In the light of this word, we will try, in the first place, to deepen the mystery of the identity of being of the divine Persons, source of the unity of the Father and of the Son and of their mutual presence. Then, we will study Hilary's way of thinking, Hilary who professes his faith in the Holy Spirit, intimately associated with the Father and the Son in the work of Salvation.

1 THE FATHER AND THE SON ARE ONE.

In reading the On the Trinity we can only be struck by the extreme emphasis with which Hilary recalls the equality of nature and of power in the Father and in the Son. The Son is not “added on” to the Father like another God. There exists between them a perfect identity of “substance”. Two texts of John’s Gospel serve as the basis of his argument: “I and the Father, we are One” (Jn 10:30) and “The Father is in me and I am in the Father”. (Jn 10:38;14,10)

-We are “ONE”.

At the beginning of Book VII, when the Bishop of Poitiers places himself with regard to the proposals of the adversaries of the true faith, he shows that the text of John 10:30 is not about a solitary God. The conjunction “and” which joins the two predicates: “I” and “the Father”, as well as the plural verb “are”, cannot be applied to one person alone. (Tr.VII,5) “The faith of the apostles does not allow for two gods because it neither allows for two Fathers nor two Sons. In recognizing the Father, it recognizes the Son. By believing in the Son, it believes also in the Father, since the name of the Father includes in itself the name of the Son. For the Father only exists because of the Son, and to point to the Son is to show the Father, since the Son only exists through the Father. For the Son completes the Father and the birth of the Son comes from the Father.” (Tr.VII,31) It is in the Son that one knows the Father. “Thus, the affirmation of only one God is not the affirmation of only one divine person, but that of the unity of two persons, the Son and the Father.” (Tr.VII,31)

The Son and the Father are the names of the persons; “One” is the affirmation of their nature which is the same in the Father and in the Son. The Latin text translates the Greek one, by “unum”, a neutral predicate. Attributed to God, - one - “is not a number, it is the expression of the divine perfection which cannot be multiplied or divided. Thus “One” is understood as a property inherent to the divine nature.”⁴⁷ “The Father is “One” because he is God; the Son is “One” because he possesses the same divine substance which has been communicated to him through generation. Behold, attests Hilary, the mystery of the birth: the Father and the Son possess only one nature.” (Tr.VII,26)

Between the Father and the Son, the unity is not only the result of their mutual love and of the harmony of their will, as the Arians propose, but it exists on an ontological level; there is unity of nature and identity of substance, without any difference. (Tr.VIII,10)

-One and the same identity of being

All through his treatise, Hilary proclaims his faith in the unity of nature in the Father and the Son. Not only what the Father has is possessed by the Son, but what the Father Is, is born in the Son. “Quod ipse est, id etiam per nativitatem Dei in Deum natum est.” (Tr.VIII,54. 252 c) The force of such formulas shows the great insistence of Hilary in order to express the unity of the Father and the Son. While being fully in a human body, the Christ, Son of God, is perfectly

⁴⁷ P. Smulders, op. cit. p 228

God. What he is, is born by a birth of God in God. “He is One with the Father insofar as he is with him one unique Reality (substance).”⁴⁸

Such affirmations are in the line of the faith of Nicaea which defines the relationship of Father and Son by the Greek term – *homousios*, which means: of the same essence and substance.⁴⁹

So there is one same identity of being between the Father and the Son. What counts above all for Hilary, is fidelity to the faith of the Church: The Father and the Son possess the unique divine nature which is One. The fact that they are two is not opposed to this unity. Indeed, if the Father is the unique God, the Son also is the unique God, being nothing other than the substance of the Father who is One. (Tr.VII,5)

On reading On the Trinity, we notice how frequent are the formulas used by the author—indeed they are repetitive – to express the identity of being between the Father and Son. His writing is a perpetual struggle against the insufficiency of words to translate the mystery of this unity of God. But Hilary wants to convince his reader. “When the faith received from the Apostles proclaims the Father, it proclaims the unique God; when it recognizes the Son, it recognizes the unique Son. One God, born of God, or one God in God is not setting forth the existence of two gods, since One proceeding from One remains in the divine nature and possesses the name of One God.” (Tr. VII,32)

Taking great care to teach what is holy, perfect and orthodox (Tr.VIII,2), after resuming the main line of his argument, Hilary bears witness to his faith in the unity of God: “We have searched for the hope of the blessed eternity in the confession of the Father and the Son... The Gospels have given us the material of our argument, they permit us to teach the true birth from God, the only Son, born from God the Father... His nature which is that of the unique God does not make him another God.” (Tr.VIII,4) If, as he says, simple good sense guided him to this conclusion, it seemed to him good to base it on the word of Christ himself who confirms this mystery of the unity of God. “He points to his birth by this name of “Father”. When we know him, we know the Father in him. When we see him, we see the Father in him. (Jn14:7-9) He is inseparable from the Father; he guarantees this when he states that he remains in the Father and that the Father lives in him. (Jn 10:38; 14:11) (Tr. VIII,4)

-The mystery of a mutual presence

We have seen how, starting from analogies of human birth and of the flame which produces another flame, very imperfect analogies in the eyes of the author, Hilary has tried to explain the mystery of the unity of God.⁵⁰ But it is especially in the dialogue with Philip and in his discourse on the feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem that the Gospel of John gives us the key text by which the Christ affirms his communion with the Father:

“The Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

⁴⁸ C Duquoc, *Different God*, Cerf, Paris 1978, p 78, note 31

⁴⁹ Cf. above, p.20-22

Jesus makes the connection between the truth of his mission and the presence of the Father in him.

“If I am not doing the works of my Father, do not believe me; but if I am doing them, even if you do not believe me, believe in these works, in order to recognize at last that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” (Jn 10: 37-38)

The mutual presence of the Father and the Son is at the heart of the revelation of God and the keystone of Hilary’s account. This presence, or reciprocal “immanence” which, in trinitarian theology, is called “Circumcession” (from the Greek: perichoresis)⁵¹ means, in the relationship of the divine persons, “compenetration”, interiority in reciprocity.

Hilary does not use this term, but he discovers, in the language of Scripture, the mystery of the communion in God, Father and Son.⁵² Christ Jesus who declares himself to be “the Way, the Truth, the Life” (Jn 14: 6) is not usurping his identity of Son, or his divine nature. “The Son does not exist in a nature exterior or other than that of God the Father, and the Father does not communicate to the only Son, in his birth, any element foreign to himself, but, on the contrary, he pours out in him all the perfections that he possesses, without any.

loss to him as giver.... The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father. God is in God.” (Tr. VII,39)

In virtue of this mutual immanence of the Father and the Son, we can then affirm that the Son is from all eternity in the Father and reciprocally. There is mutual gift between the Father and the Son and total welcome of each person, and this gift and this welcome can only be fulfilled in otherness. If the identity of being of Father and Son is source of communion, “the difference which exists between the divine persons – the Father is not the Son – is also condition of their communication” at the level of relationship.”⁵³

That the Father “remains” in the Son is indeed the proof that he is not solitary and unique, in the same way that the Son is not solitary and unique since the words that he speaks, he does not say them of himself, (Jn 14:10). Thus, the Father is not separable from the Son since he expresses himself by the mouth of the Son. And Hilary continues: “Here we see the mystery of these two who are One: each of the two is not the other, they who are one in the other by the specific character of their divine nature. The Father speaks and acts through the Son, and the Son speaks and carries out the works of the Father”. (Tr.VII,40)

“To be reciprocally one in the other, to possess the perfect unity of a subsistent nature is not the attribute of material natures, explains Hilary. This is a characteristic that belongs to God, the only Son, ...it is the work of a spiritual power that one person be in another...and that one be not without the other.” (Tr. VII,41)

But the unity of the Father and the Son is not a “face-to-face”, a mutual contemplation closed on itself. The communion between the Father and the Son opens to a third “person”, the Spirit.

⁵¹ K Rahner, H. Vorgrimler, Little Dictionary of Catholic Theology. Seuil 1970
“Circumcession” p 76

⁵² In a recent work: Trinity and Society, Cerf 1990, L.Boff uses the concept of perichoresis to present the mystery of communion in God Trinity.

⁵³ Ch. Duquoc, op.cit. p 120

2 THE SPIRIT, MANIFESTATION OF THE COMMUNION IN GOD TRINITY

The place given to the Spirit in the On the Trinity can seem, at first glance, very limited, which, in the eyes of some commentators, casts doubt on the accuracy of the title given to Hilary of Poitiers' treatise.⁵⁴ When the author presents the outline of his work, he recalls the baptismal formula, basis of the faith in God Trinity. Because he adheres fully to the faith of the Church and of his baptism, he wants to ensure that those who must be baptised in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit understand "the true meaning of these names" and that they perceive "each of the persons as they are and as they ought to be named". (Tr.I,21)

When Hilary turns to the subject of the Spirit in his account, he confesses his embarrassment. His dilemma: on the one hand, it would be unsatisfactory to pass over the Spirit in silence, and, on the other hand, there ought to be no need to speak about the Spirit.

"To my thinking, we should not even talk about its existence. It exists, it is given, received, possessed. It is of God. Linked to the Father and the Son in our profession of faith, it could not be separated from this when we recognize the Father and the Son." (Tr.II,29) Adding to these remarks, Hilary appeals to the apostle Paul: "And the proof that you are children of God, is that God has sent into your hearts the Spirit of his Son who cries out: Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4,6)

Let us try to follow Hilary's thinking in order to discover the meaning of the word "Spirit". Does it name a divine person, the Holy Spirit? What is its origin? What is its mission?

-God is Spirit.

It is difficult to speak about the Spirit. The same word, in Hebrew (*ruah*) and in Greek (*pneuma*), means "breath", "wind", "spirit"; it names the wind as well as the breath of respiration, the human spirit and the Spirit of God.⁵⁵ We find the two meanings of *pneuma* in the text of Jn 3:8: "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its voice, but you do not know where it comes from nor where it goes. So it is with someone who is born of the Spirit." In the prayer which serves as conclusion to his treatise, Hilary takes up the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: "The Spirit is not limited by anything: it speaks when it wishes, it says what it wishes and where it wishes. The reason for its going and its coming stays unknown to me." (Tr.XII,56)

At the beginning of his writing about the Spirit, Hilary expresses the perplexity of some people because the word "Spirit" is also used to name the Father and the Son. The word "Spirit", does it mean the divine nature or the Holy Spirit her/himself? In Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman, John uses the expression: "God is Spirit" (Jn 4:24). If by "Spirit", we mean the divine nature, "it is not surprising, says Hilary, that this word names just as well the Son and the Father. Both one and the other, indeed, are Spirit and Holy." (Tr.II,30) The response of Jesus "must not lead us to deny the name of Holy Spirit to the

⁵⁴ P.Smolders, op.cit. p 263. Note 1. The author mentions, in particular, the opinion of Turmel "The On the Trinity, inaccurately called by this name, for it is scarcely about the Holy Spirit whose personality is not even suspected..." Review of Religious History and Literature, T 8 1922, p191.

⁵⁵ V.T.B. "Spirit", 388 – 389

gift we have received... He replies to the woman who imprisons God in a temple or on a mountain, by suggesting this: all is in God and God is in Godself.... the God Spirit must be worshipped in the Spirit. He shows us that those who worship in this way worship God in all freedom.” (Tr.II,31) If this expression “Spirit of God” names equally the Father and the Son, it does not exclude the Spirit Paraclete. (Tr. VIII,25)

In spite of the obscurity of Hilary’s commentaries on the Spirit, we can however discover that, for him, the Holy Spirit is a “personal reality”. In basing himself on Paul’s text: “For the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. .3,17) . He sees a distinction between the one who is Spirit and the one of whom it is the Spirit.” (Tr.II,32) Even if Hilary does not name the Holy Spirit “a person”, he considers it as a personal reality belonging to the nature of the Son, but also belonging to the nature of the Father . (Tr.VIII,26) Hilary distinguishes “natura”, applied to the Father, and “res naturae”, attributed to the Spirit. “The Father is the original nature, the primordial source; the Holy Spirit is the communicated nature, in other words, the being who belongs to God as to its source.” ⁵⁶

-The Spirit, gift of the Father and of the Son

How is the Holy Spirit, “personal reality”, the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son? In order to reply to such a question, Hilary bases his reflection on the words of Christ who promises to send, from the Father, the Spirit who comes forth from the Father:

“When the Paraclete comes that I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father he will bear witness to me.” (John 15,26)

The Spirit comes from the Father. The repetition of the same formula “a Patre” shows the insistence of the text of John to specify the origin of the Spirit. It comes forth, proceeds “procedit”. “The Paraclete will come, the Son will send It from the Father.”.. “He sends, and by that proves his power.” (Tr.VIII,19)

How can we understand this word from the Gospel? “Has the Father received this Spirit, has this Spirit sprung forth from the Father, or has the Father given birth to this Spirit? wonders Hilary. Now, the One who must be sent from the Father is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father. Therefore, It has not been received by the Father, since It comes forth from the Father. But are we considering the coming forth from the Father of a person brought to birth?” (Tr. VIII,19) Hilary does not give a clear response to this question. However, in the final prayer of the On the Trinity, he proclaims his faith in Christ, the unique Son who is not “a creature” and protests against such a label being applied to the Holy Spirit:

“I would not allow such a name to be given to your Holy Spirit, come forth from you and sent by your Son, I would not say that the Holy Spirit is “brought to birth” or that it has ever been created. Nothing outside of yourself examines your mystery, nothing which is foreign or exterior to yourself.” (Tr.XII,55)

The Spirit sent by the Son proceeds from the Father and “receives” equally from the Son. What does John mean when he reports the word of the Christ himself?

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will bring you into the complete truth. For It will not speak from Itself, but what it hears, It will say. It is from what is mine that It receives and It will reveal this to you.” (Jn 16:13-14)

⁵⁶ A.Palmieri, article “Holy Spirit”, in D.T.C. vol.V col 747

Hilary tries to clarify the meaning of this text. Thus, says-he, the Spirit who receives from the Father, receives also from the Son, since he transmits his word, and whoever receives from the Son, receives also from the Father, for everything that the Father possesses is his: power, perfection, word ...All that the Father has belongs to the Son and everything that the Son has belongs to the Father. It is the Son himself who gives the assurance: "All that is mine is yours." When the Son speaks like this, he is not speaking of a common possession as of creatures, but of the unity of nature. The Holy Spirit being the Spirit of God receives then what belongs to the Son; thence, what It receives from the Father, It receives from the divine nature Itself, the very substance of the Father and the Son. "Receive from the Son and receive from the Father are one and the same thing." (Tr.VIII,20)

Thus, the unity which exists between the Father and the Son is manifested in the gift of the Spirit. Therefore, we can say that the Father is at the origin of the "mission" of the Spirit; the Son also is at the "origin" of this sending. Both, in perfect communion, send the Spirit; in the sending of the Spirit, as in all things, they are "One" (John 10,30) The sending of the Spirit, gift of the Father and of the Son, reveals the mystery of the communion in God Trinity.

-The mission of the Spirit

The Spirit exists. It is God. Sent from the Father by the Son, It is conferred on those who have faith as a gift: "Spiritus est Dei, donum Fidelium". (Tr.II,29 44 b) But how does the mission of the Spirit become concrete reality in the life of believers and of the community? Starting from the scriptural texts quoted by Hilary, we will try to draw out clearly the essential aspects of the Spirit's mission: presence and truth, communion and bearing witness.

The promise of the coming of the Spirit Paraclete is linked to the departure of Jesus: "It is for your benefit that I am leaving, because, if I do not go, the Paraclete will not come to you, but if I go, I will send It." (Jn 16:7) Thus Jesus wants to tell his disciples that the Spirit will not be able to be recognized until he himself will have disappeared. This absence is the condition of an interior **presence** realized by the gift of the Spirit. Once he has left, the Spirit will take on Its mission to be their Comforter: "And I myself will pray to the Father and he will send you another Comforter to **be-with-you** forever, the Spirit of Truth." (Jn 14: 16-17)

This mission of presence of the Spirit that is strongly emphasised by the expression "**be-with**", is a gift offered to the believers to open their understanding to the mystery of God. "Since our weakness does not allow us to grasp either the Father, or the Son, it is in the gift of the Holy Spirit, through this sort of connection of friendship that is Its intercession, to enlighten our faith on the mystery so difficult to understand of the incarnation of God." (Tr. II,33) To believe in the mystery of the Word of God incarnate is beyond our human capacities.

Hilary again takes up the teaching of Paul in order to underline the role of the Spirit of **Truth**: "This is why, I tell you, no one speaking in the Spirit of God says: "Cursed be Jesus, and no one can say: "Jesus is Lord", if not with the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:3)

In the line of this mission of presence, Hilary touches equally on the mystery of the interior presence, someone who "lives" in us (Rom.8: 11) But the author's explanations remain vague, for Hilary never defines the Spirit as "person": "The Spirit of God is present in us, but the Spirit of Christ is also present in us, and when the Spirit of Christ is in us, the Spirit of God is also there." (Tr. VIII,27)

The mission of the Spirit is directed towards the bearing of witness, lived out in the **Communion** with God and in the community of believers. Hilary bases himself on the teaching of Paul and, more particularly on 1 Cor. 12. The gifts of the Spirit are most varied, as ministries are also most varied; they are at the service of everyone; they all come from the same source: one and the same Spirit. “And this unique gift which is in Christ is given to everyone in fullness. It is completely available to us, but it is given in the measure to which each person wants to welcome it... Through the action of these gifts, it is he who is the pledge of our future hope, he is the light for our spirits, he is the splendour of our minds.” (Tr.II,35) Thus everything is rooted in the unity of the Spirit. One Spirit alone works through these gifts and shares them out for the building up of the body of Christ which is the body of everyone.” (Tr.VIII,32)

Source of the word and of action, the Spirit is an energy promised to the community of believers in order to **bear witness** to its faith. The mission of the Spirit is inherent in the very mystery of the Church. Hilary quotes the book of Acts. Jesus Risen sends his disciples to announce the word of Salvation: “You will receive strength, that of the Holy Spirit, who will come down on you. Then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in the whole of Judaea and Samaria, and to the furthest ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) (Tr.VIII,30)

IN SEARCH OF A SYNTHESIS

The course that we have just covered in reading the Treatise of Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, has allowed us to put down some important markers in order to go back to the source of mission in God Trinity. At this stage it seems worthwhile to pick out some of the lines of thought which emerge from this theological address, in order to better encapsulate the Christian vision of the revelation of God in Jesus-Christ, Word that God Addresses to us in order to uncover the mystery of God’s intimate life and of our Salvation.

The mission of the only Son, born of the Father, come in our flesh, and the mission of the Spirit, gift of the Father and the Son who manifests their communion, are rooted in the heart of the mystery of human existence. The cohesion of a theological address on **MISSION** cannot, indeed, be imagined without an anthropological reflection on the meaning of the life of human beings. God and the human being cannot be thought about separately: the human being, created in the image of God, is and thinks of itself in the existential relationship with God Trinity. This lived relationship with God, Father, Son and Spirit, seen as source of human fulfilment, constitutes the kernel of the message that the community of believers is called to transmit to the heart of the world.

Our synthesis is organized around the following linked themes: **God is ONE, God, incarnate “word”, God, mystery of communion and of sending.**

1. GOD IS ONE.

God in the mystery of God's intimate life is One, but God is not solitary; this is the fundamental datum at the base of Hilary's theological reflection, affirming that the Father and the Son have "only one name, only one nature, in one and the same divinity".

- The question of the NAME serves as the point of departure for this address on the unity of the Father and the Son. In the Old Testament tradition, the Name of God, at the same time revealed and hidden, signifies the very mystery of God. The God of the Exodus reveals God's Name to Moses: "I am the one who am (or will be)". God is the one who "IS", this is God's own name which corresponds to God's intimate being and becomes the sign of God's presence among human beings.
The passage from the old covenant with the unique God, to the new faith in Jesus-Christ, Son of God, happens around the Name, a name which is carrier of the very reality of the Being of Christ Jesus. The name given to the Son expresses his identity of being. He is God, truly God. This name is suited to him by virtue of his nature. The reality of his being is in his name. God is his only authentic name because he identifies himself with what it designates. In God alone, we can state in the faith, there is total identity between the Being and the Name.
- The Son is God through his **BIRTH**. In the mystery of the divine sonship, the Father transmits to the Son all that God is. The One comes from the One, he is God and he is Son. If the name of father is understood when we pronounce the name of son, we can say that in God, the Father only exists because of the Son, and to designate the Son is to show the Father, since the Son only exists through the Father. In the same way that the particularity of the Father is to be eternally constituted in his fatherhood, so also the particularity of the Son is to be always and eternally Son. In revealing himself as the Son, Jesus-Christ reveals that Father is the name which most profoundly expresses the being of God. Son of the living God, he is the only one who knows the Father and is able to reveal God as Father. According to an audacious formula of Hilary: "Patrem consumat Filius" (Tr.VII,31 201c) the Son "completes", "fulfils" the Father. The term evokes an idea of fullness. In the Son and through him, the Father is revealed in a definitive and total manner. God is only known as Father through the Son. It is "starting from" the Son that we know the Father. When the Son says that he reveals the Name of the Father, he means to manifest the work of Salvation of which the Name of the Father is the symbol: "I have revealed your Name to those..." (John 1:6) "made your Name known to them and I will continue to make it known"....(John 17:26)
- God born of God, through the mystery of his birth in the eternal being of God, the Son is the living **IMAGE** of the living God. It is by sonship that the Christ is image. We see the Father through the Son, "revelation in the image". He makes visible what no one can see and reveals the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son, the communion in the same likeness; he is transparent to the mystery of his Father.

- What connection can we establish between the mystery of the Son, God born of God, “image of the invisible God” and the condition of the human being?

The human condition is the place where the mystery of God is revealed. Already in the Old Testament revelation, the human being – woman and man – created “in the image of God” (Gen.1:26,29) is recognized as person; called by name, inscribed in the revelation of the Name of God. In revealing God’s Name, God enters a dialogue and engages in a covenant with the chosen one. The God of the Patriarchs, the God of Moses sets up a relationship of person to person with the human being and, through that, makes them partners in dialogue.

In Jesus-Christ, perfect image of God, the mystery of the human being is lit up with a new light: the living human exists and thinks of itself in the existential relationship with God Trinity. We discover the meaning of our being and of our existence in Jesus-Christ, the Son of God, One with the Father. The mystery of divine sonship reveals the deep meaning of the human created in the image of God. Because Jesus is the Son of God, as a human being, he is “the paradigm of the divine ‘consanguinity’ of every human being. First-born of a multitude of brothers and sisters (Rom 8:29) he is “the son of man” or the human as “daughter/son”.⁵⁷ In Jesus-Christ, Son of God, the human being is called to become child of God, to reproduce the image of the Son. But this capacity is gift of God. It is because they are children that human beings can be called “children of God” in the Son. The filial humanity of Jesus-Christ reveals the filial status of every human and specifies human beings as the place of God’s revelation.

2. GOD, “WORD ENFLESHED”

“Come forth” from God, God from all eternity, the Son is Word of God. God is named by a noun of language: the Word. “And the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). The mystery of the incarnation is the central action by which God is spoken to human beings. God speaks, God does not give information. In speaking to human beings, the Christ did not make speeches, but has entered into the train of their existence, taking it on fully in his flesh and blood. It is in bearing witness to this particular existence of Christ, Son of God, Word made flesh, that the Christian faith can bring a human person into the understanding of their human condition and of Salvation in Jesus-Christ.

Word incarnated in a “body of flesh”, the Christ Son of God is at the same time revelation and communication of God to human beings. Through him, not only does God speak, but there is incarnation of the Word there where it is the most absent, in the flesh. God comes where human beings are, God inserts Godself in all truth in the human condition and takes it on. “God the Word becomes flesh in order that, through the Word of God made flesh, the flesh itself might be lifted up to the Word of God.” (Tr.1,11)

⁵⁷ L. Panier, op cit, p 333

The incarnation of the word of God in Jesus-Christ is written therefore in the heart of the reality in which we live, a reality that human beings neglect, not to say refuse, in the heart of their real condition. The word becomes flesh and has no other place to be listened to and welcomed than the body, and this seems to us of prime importance in the revelation of the mystery of God Trinity.

-Who is the human being in Jesus-Christ, Word made flesh?

The human being is a being of language, and the word gives itself to be heard in a body. "The body is the place where flesh and language are linked together, and it is in that link that a human being must be a subject who speaks."⁵⁸ The communication that God makes in Jesus-Christ meets in the human being a place of welcome of the word and a capacity for dialogue. To say that God speaks presupposes that one feels challenged by a word whose divine origin one acknowledges. To admit such a truth does not depend on intellectual knowledge; only faith can open the believer to hear what the Word of God made flesh, is saying, the one who has come to reveal to us the mystery of God: "If we believe in the one that God has sent, we will hear the voice of God, we will see his face and the word will live in those who believe." (Tr.IX, 21)

In Jesus-Christ, God gives his word to a human person, but the welcome of this word then supposes, from the side of the human being, an attitude of faith, in other words, of trust and of surrender to the word of another. For "the word of God is always a human word, it only reaches the human through the medium of human beings, and it only speaks if it reaches the human person in her/his existence and becomes revelatory."⁵⁹

3. GOD, MYSTERY OF COMMUNION

God is One, but God is not solitary. The affirmation of one and only God is not the affirmation of only one divine person, but the unity of two persons, the Father and the Son. Two texts of John's Gospel serve as a basis to the thinking of Hilary of Poitiers: "I and the Father, we are One" (Jn 10:30) and "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38; 14:10). We have underlined the importance of "one and the same identity of being and of one and the same equality of substance" as foundation of the unity of the Father and the Son and of their mutual presence. If the mutual relationship of the Father and the Son is at the heart of the revelation of God in Jesus-Christ, this relationship is not a "face-to-face", it opens onto a third "personal reality", the **SPIRIT**.

The Spirit is affirmed as principle of communion in God Trinity. The life in God Trinity is communion, full gift and welcome of each of the divine persons. Now this gift and this welcome can only be realised in otherness, and this otherness is condition of their

⁵⁸ L. Panier, op cit, p 340

⁵⁹ M. Neusch, Christians and their Vision of Human Beings. Desclee, 1985, p 152

communication in relationship. Gift of the Father and of the Son, the Spirit maintains and attests to the open relationship between the Father and the Son. It is the openness of the divine communion to that which is not divine. The God designated in the trinitarian symbol is the “open one,” God is communication; source of life and of sharing, God comes towards God’s creature. According to the expression of C. Duquoc, “the Spirit is the “ecstasy” of God towards God’s “other,” the creature”.⁶⁰

- “If God is communion, God is “plural” in God’s life; if humanity is in God’s image, it is “plural” by analogy.”⁶¹ The human being is essentially a being of relationship. The otherness which is a structural element of the human being finds its foundation in the mystery of the relationship in God Father, Son and Spirit. According to the Christian revelation, the human being only becomes comprehensible in the light of the plan of God revealed in Jesus-Christ. The ultimate foundation of the dignity of the human being lies in the fact that the human participates in God’s nature. In Jesus-Christ, true God and true man, God and the human being constitute one and the same mystery, and the mystery of the human only really lights up in the mystery of the Son, Word of God made flesh. Through him and in him, the human being is a being-with-God, a being who has his/her truth in the communion with God. In Jesus-Christ, in his life of communion with the Father, in the Spirit, we are offered “the perfect model of what a human life is that is totally faithful to its vocation of communion with God and of relationship with brothers and sisters in humanity”.⁶² The Spirit is the artisan of this communion with God and in the community of believers.

4. MISSION ROOTED IN GOD TRINITY

These few fundamental ideas from the theological reflection of Hilary of Poitiers, put together with the existential dimension of the human being, are going to allow us to situate mission at the heart of the mystery of God Trinity. God is mystery of communion; God is mystery of sending out. God communicates Godself by the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit; so, there are two who are sent, two sendings for one and the same work of God: the Salvation of the human being. In the light of this reflection, we will try to make clearer how the Mission of the Son, the One Sent of the Father, and the Mission of the Spirit have an influence on the way we speak about mission today and on the status of “the missionary”.

a. The One Sent of the Father

The one sent does not come of him/herself; he/she is mandated by another, and their mission only has meaning if s/he represents the one who sends them. Jesus-Christ is the One Sent of the Father, the living revelation of God. Son of God, come in our flesh, through his word and through his actions, he has shown to men and women the Name of God, in other words, the mystery of his being. Identified with the Word of God, he is the human voice and face of God and therefore the living proof of the existence of the Father who sent him and of

⁶⁰ C. Duquoc, op cit, p.120f

⁶¹ Dictionary of Theology, Cerf 1988. Man, image of God, p. 303-308

⁶² Initiation to the Practice of Theology Dogmatics II Cerf 1983, p 535

the communication which unites the Father and the Son in the Spirit. Because God wanted to reveal Godself in a man, the humanity of human beings is at the heart of this sending. Through the mystery of the incarnation of the Son in the human condition, God enters fully into the future of human beings and takes charge of their Salvation so that humans might enter fully into the life of God.

The Father has the initiative of sending. Jesus defines himself as the one who is sent. In the Gospel of John, the expression returns like a “leitmotif”: (“the one who sent me”. Jesus appears as a man totally engaged in his mission and at the same time conscious of the mystery of his person; at once Son and the One Sent, he comes in the name of his Father (Jn 5:43) He is listening to his Father and speaks the word that he has heard (Jn 3:36), and this word is truth for man and woman. His work is that of the Father, and the Son can do of himself nothing that he has not seen the Father do (Jn 5:19). In full freedom, he acts in total dependence on the Father because he lives in communion with the Father, in the Spirit: dependence based in love.

-The message of Salvation in Jesus-Christ

What is the Salvation announced by Jesus-Christ, the One Sent of the Father? Nothing other than communion with God, the call to participate in God’s mystery, to live with God’s life. God is Life manifested in Jesus-Christ, Word of life. As the Father is source of life, so also he the Son, participates in this life and has the power to give it, to “do” it “vivificare” (Jn 5:20) This life in the Christ, Word of life, dead and risen, allows the believer access in a vital and existential way to the very mystery of God. It is an appeal to the communion of the Father, Son and Spirit. Salvation, for a human being, is therefore to enter into this relationship of communion in order to participate in the eternal life of God revealed in Jesus-Christ, in listening to the “voice of the Son of God”, God’s Word who gives life and resurrection. “In truth... the one who listens to my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life” (Jn 5: 24) ... “If I speak of this, it is for your Salvation” (Jn 5:25) The word is therefore at the heart of the mission of the One Sent of the Father and of his message of Salvation for humans.

-The mission of the One Sent

“To be sent”, is to be at the level of the sent Son. “As the Father sent me, I also send you” (John 20,21). This key phrase, in John’s text, places the mission of every person sent in the dynamism of the Mission which has its source in God Trinity and founds the mission of the Church. Jesus does not say: the Father sent me and I send you, but **as** the Father has sent me, I also I send you. As the Son is connected to the Father, is always listening to the Father and transmits the message of life of the Father, so also the Christian is “sent” to live the mission at the heart of history, so that men and women discover, in truth, the meaning of their life according to the Father’s plan.

If the word – listened to, received, transmitted – is the focal point of the mission of the One Sent of the Father and of the message of Salvation, it must also be the centre of the mission of every person sent. The word is, in itself, power of life and of Salvation. Thus, the mission of transmitting the word does not consist only in communicating a message. The word, indeed, is not a message to know, a programme to apply; it works in the heart of every

believer and of every community of believers. That is why the connection word/flesh must be placed at the heart of the proclamation of the Good News which requires an “incarnated” message. The person sent is “servant of the word”; his/her mission is to open a way for the word to be heard and welcomed in faith and hope. But s/he knows also that the word of truth can meet resistance and rejection and can provoke misunderstanding and division.

b. The Mission of the SPIRIT

Although the Mission proper to the Spirit, in the trinitarian theology of Hilary of Poitiers, may have seemed unclear to us, we were able, all the same, to draw out some essential ideas on the revelation of Its being and of Its action. The Spirit belongs to God as to Its source, it is the “communicated” nature, the connection between the Father and the Son. The sending of the Spirit, gift of the Father and the Son, reveals the mystery of communion in God Trinity. We can then, in the faith, affirm that if the Father is at the origin of the Mission of the Spirit, the Son also is mainspring of the sending; both send the Spirit in perfect communion. The Mission of the Spirit is connected to the Mission of the Son, Word incarnate. Sent from the Father by the Son, the Spirit is conferred as a gift to the faithful, “donum fidelium”, to make of them children of God, in the image of the Son, and to open their mind to the mystery of God who is communion. Source of the word and of action, the Spirit is an energy promised to the community of believers to bear witness to its faith.

-To be a witness impelled by the Spirit

If the mission of every person sent is situated in the Mission of the Son, the One Sent of the Father, it is rooted also in the Mission of the Spirit. In the person of Jesus-Christ, the Word of God has entered our history and given us a share in his Spirit, and “gives it without limit” (John 3:34). According to the promises of Christ Jesus, the Spirit is energy to bear witness, and this energy lives in the first disciples of Jesus. The apostles are sent as witnesses and, under the impulse of the Spirit, their witness becomes the foundation of the whole community of believers. They are the first witnesses who confessed Jesus, Son of God, alive and risen, and it is on the basis of this confession that the Christian community is founded and that it continues, from generation to generation, to bear witness and to live.

“Access to the founding witness passes therefore by the community of witnesses which, today, adds faith to what has been received and what it transmits in its turn.”⁶³ To draw some outline of the strength of a “humanity on mission”, we need to go back to the witness of the Son and of the Spirit, the Ones Sent of the Father, in order to clarify how the witness attests that s/he is sent.

What is the mission of the witness?

A witness is not satisfied with stating facts, with transmitting a message; it is someone who commits herself to the service of the truth and gives the authentic interpretation of what she has seen and heard. The mission of every witness, in the community of believers, is grafted on the Mission of Christ Jesus himself, the supreme Witness. Faithful Witness, he bears

⁶³ G. Lafont *God, Time and Being*, Cerf 1986, p. 145f

witness to what he has seen and heard close to the Father (Jn 3:11,32). Because he bears witness to what he is himself, he can affirm the validity of his own witness: Although I bear witness to myself, my witness is worthwhile, because I know from whence, I have come and where I am going". (Jn 8:14) More than the works accomplished, he knows that the Father himself bears witness to him (Jn8:16) The Spirit, in turn, bears witness to Jesus: "When the Paraclete comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will bear witness to me, but you also, you will bear witness." (Jn 14:26-27)

Two key words can characterize the mission of the witness: **listening and commitment**.

The primacy of **listening**:

The word is at the heart of the mission of the witness. The first witnesses of Christ Jesus did not claim to speak in their own name, but in virtue of the mission which they received from Christ himself, they understood themselves as servants of a word which is at the foundation of their witness. Before being capable of speaking the word, we must listen to it. The Spirit is the capacity of listening and of welcoming the word. Because It is the Spirit of Truth, according to the promise of Jesus himself, the Spirit guides each one towards the total truth: "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I said to you." (Jn 14:26) The Spirit opens up the riches of God's word to every human being, thus the witness must be listening to the Spirit who is at work in every human being. The energy of the Spirit is alive in the word and raises up interpreters capable of discerning, in the light of the Scripture, what is being lived out in the human community. The witness then becomes the one who reveals what is already present in others, and of which they are unaware: a word which is source of renewal and of communion.

Commitment

The life of the witness is commitment. The life of Jesus was never a life for himself, but for men and women, and a life of relationship with God, because it was obedience to a mission received, animated by the conviction Jesus had, before everything else, of accomplishing the desire of the one who had sent him (Jn 5:30) Commitment is rooted in faith. The witnesses of Christ are those who believe in his word and commit themselves, under the impulse of the Spirit, to bear witness to their faith through the whole of their life. When we say commitment, we are not necessarily saying control over events. To want to commit oneself in a missionary task does not mean that one enters into a strategy; the Spirit makes a game of programmes and methods, and often leads the witnesses of the Gospel on roads they had not foreseen, at the mercy of circumstances and of encounters.

The mission needs witnesses capable of hearing the word and of proclaiming it, capable also of recognizing the effects of this word and the signs of the presence of the Spirit who is working at the heart of human history.

This try at a synthesis has allowed us to bring out some essential elements of the presentation of Hilary of Poitiers and to place them in an anthropological perspective, in order to better

clarify our reflection on the foundation of **MISSION** which is rooted in the Mission of the Son, the One Sent of the Father, and the Mission of the Spirit.

We propose now, in a second part, to turn to a reading of the Acts of the Apostles, in order to discover, in a new light, “the primitive witness of a Church which is born in mission”.⁶⁴ The fourth chapter of Acts will be the main object of this study which will revolve around the themes of the **NAME**, of the **WORD** and of the **SENDING**.

⁶⁴ L Panier Light and Life no. 205, 1992, p.103

M. Benedicte's Thesis GOD TRINITY SOURCE OF MISSION

Translation: SECOND PART

THE TRINITARIAN STRUCTURE OF MISSION

IN ACTS 4: 1 – 31

INTRODUCTION

Rereading the book of the Acts of the Apostles in order to discover the original witness of a Church which is born in mission is not a nostalgic return towards the past, but rather a desire to follow back to the source of Mission in its first “spouting forth”. Indeed, we could ask ourselves how relevant might be the contribution from a socio-cultural and religious context so different from the one in which we live today. Can the faith announced by the first witnesses of Christ Jesus, communicated by the proclamation of the Word at the heart of the Jewish and Greco-Roman world of the first century, respond to the issues of mission and to the questions asked in Christian communities twenty centuries later? What connection can we find between those who have borne witness and those who, today, hear their witness?

If the Christian faith recognizes the foundational character of the witness of the first disciples of Christ, we must listen to their message and discern what therein continues to carry meaning now. The mission they received from Christ Jesus himself is above all a call to become witnesses capable, under the impulse of the Spirit, of announcing the good news of Salvation “starting from Jerusalem as far as the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). They call themselves witnesses.... But of what do they bear witness?

At the heart of their message, we hear this affirmation formulated on several occasions in Acts: “This Jesus whom you have killed,... God has raised him up” (Acts 2: 22-23). It is on the basis of a profession about Jesus, dead and risen, that the Christian community is constituted and that it continues to bear witness and to live.

The speech of Peter, on the first Pentecost day, shows clearly the structure of the witness of the Apostles which links the mission of Christ Jesus to that of the Spirit, according to the plan of the Father:

“God has raised up this **Jesus**, we are witnesses of that. And now lifted up by God’s right hand, he has received from the **Father** the promised **Holy Spirit** and has poured it out. This is what you see and hear.” (Acts 2:32-33)

Before we can name as “trinitarian” the structure of the Church’s mission, we need to listen to the announcement of the good news, attested by the first witnesses, and to discern what becomes of the Word in the community of believers. As a way of specifying more clearly their witness, we will take as a basis for reflection and study, the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles which describes a context clearly limited, set in Jerusalem, and for actors the Apostles, among them Peter who, from Pentecost onwards, takes first place in the newborn community.

We could not isolate the fourth chapter of Acts from its immediate context; the connection of this text with the preceding chapter is obvious. It is part of a well-organised sequence: the healing of the paralysed man at the Temple gate (Acts 3:1-10) leads to Peter speaking up

before the people (3:11-26); these two episodes cannot be separated from the two that follow: the arrest and trial of the apostles Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22) and the prayer of the community of believers after the release of the apostles. (4: 23-31)

In order to clearly show the conditions and the effects of the proclamation of the word by the first witnesses sent by Christ Jesus to announce the good news of Salvation, we will begin by studying the overall way the text is organised, firstly looking at how the story is framed; then we will work through a detailed analysis of each of the sequences and how they are joined together.

FIRST CHAPTER

GLOBAL ORGANISATION OF THE TEXT

A rapid overview of the fourth chapter of Acts, the exact object of our study, allows us to pick out, in the first part (Acts 4:1-22), several sequences which relate the ups and downs of the arrest of Peter and John and their appearance before the Sanhedrin. Then, in the second part (Acts 4:23-31), the scene moves, the apostles have been released and re-join the community of believers whose prayer the author describes. Before starting a more detailed analysis of the structure of the text, we will point out the elements which make up the framework of the narrative, by placing in context the different actors, in space and in time.

A THE FRAMEWORK OF THE NARRATIVE

The indications of places and times allow us to situate the first episode (Acts 4:1-22) in close association with the events that took place at the “Beautiful Gate” of the Temple, in the heart of Jerusalem where Peter, after the healing of a crippled man, spoke to the people. The sudden arrival of the Jewish religious leaders interrupts the preaching of the apostles:

“They were still speaking to the people when the priests arrived, accompanied by the officer in charge of the Temple guards and the Sadducees.” (4:1)

The narrative of the arrest of the apostles and their appearance (before the court) plays out in several changes of place and movements of the actors. Arrested near the Temple, at the portico of Solomon, according to the last place mentioned in Acts 3 :11, the two apostles are transferred to the prison (Acts 4:3) till the following morning, because, according to the text, “evening was already falling”. (4:3) The next day Peter and John appear before the entire Sanhedrin: the questioning, then the speech of Peter (v. 8-12) which puts the judges into real perplexity (v.13-17). After the deliberation of the members of the Sanhedrin, with no mention of the time of day, we learn of the second appearance of the apostles who are condemned to silence and forbidden to speak or to teach in the Name of Jesus (v.18).

While the episode of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin is situated in places closely linked to the Temple, symbol of the power of the Jewish religious authorities, the second part of the fourth chapter (4:23-31) moves to an unspecified place. The apostles, set at liberty, go” to their own group” (v,23) Only one spatial indication can be taken from verse 27: met together

in this city”, which allows us to situate in Jerusalem the community of believers, but without an exact placement; the text indicates only, in verse 31: “the place where they were”.

-The actors

The narrative presents several groups of actors. In the first sequence there are two opposing groups whose power and importance are sharply contrasted. On one side, the two apostles, Peter and John, insignificant men who are described as “uneducated people”, “uncultured”, and identified as “those who-were-with-Jesus” (v.13) To these two men is joined another witness, the healed cripple who will not let go of the apostles (3:11), a silent witness, but whose healing speaks volumes. Face to face with these men, powerless in the eyes of the religious leaders, we see a very organized group, formed of all the representatives of the Jewish authorities: the priests, the officer in charge of the Temple guards and the Sadducees (4:1) members of the priestly aristocracy and adversaries of the doctrine of the resurrection. The great Sanhedrin, Council of Israel, before which the apostles are brought for judgment, constitutes an imposing body; not only the Jewish leaders, the elders and the scribes united in Jerusalem (v.5), but also several most important personalities are named: Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, Jonathan, and Alexander, and all the members of the High priestly families. (v.6)

Between these two groups, and linked with them, a collective group: the people who saw the crippled man “walk and praise God” (3:9) and who are “filled with fear and amazement”, beside themselves (3:10). Peter addresses them and calls them “people of Israel”. It is also question of “all the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (4:16). The people do not openly take sides, but struck by the healing of the cripple, they seem ready to welcome the witness of the apostles. Their position remains ambiguous: further on in the text the author mentions that “no one dared join them, but the people spoke highly of them”. (5:13-14)

In the second part of the fourth chapter (4:23-31), the liberated apostles go “to their own group”; no other specific information allowing us to know if this means only the apostles or the whole community of believers. On the other hand, a new opposition group is introduced into the speech; they are the representatives of the political power, Herod and Pilate associated with the pagan nations who are going to work together with the people of Israel (v.27) to exclude the apostles and to oppose those who put their faith in Christ Jesus. From the apostles’ side, the opposition of the leaders is seen as a fulfilment of the Scriptures; the reference to Psalm 2 will give a meaning to the rejection of the Jewish authorities and the pagan nations:

“Why were the Gentiles furious, why did people make their useless plots?
The kings of the earth prepared themselves, and the rulers met together against
the Lord and against his Messiah.”

(Ps 2:1-2)

-Invisible actors

One invisible actor has a unique place: Jesus Christ, the Nazarene (v. 2,10,13,18) It is in his name that the apostles teach and announce the resurrection of the dead (v.2), it is through his name that the cripple stands healed before the religious leaders and before all the people, this Jesus whose origin everyone knows, he is “the Nazarene”. The circumstances of his death are known to everyone, and this Jesus condemned to death, crucified, God has raised him up. (v.10) In their prayer to God, the apostles name him “your holy servant Jesus whom you have anointed”. (v.27)

God is revealed in his relationship to Jesus and through the actions God accomplishes, not only in favour of his servant, but as Master of the creation. It is to God that the prayer of the believers is addressed, in direct speech: “It is you who made heaven and earth” (v.24), “it is you who said..”(v.25)

To these two actors, Christ Jesus and God, whose invisible presence is revealed all through the fourth chapter, a third divine actor appears, in connection with the different groups present: the Holy Spirit. Peter is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v.8). It is by the Holy Spirit that God speaks (v.25) Finally, the apostles, the community of believers in prayer, “all were filled with the Holy Spirit”. (v.31)

Does not this action of the Holy Spirit, in the community of the apostles and of the first believers, inaugurate the new gift of Godself in the Holy Spirit, continuing the work of Christ Jesus for the Salvation of humanity? Mission does not come simply from human initiative and enterprise. The proclamation of faith in Christ risen cannot be carried out without the gift of the Spirit; if the apostles are capable of carrying out their mission as “witnesses of the resurrection”, is it not because they have been seized by the dynamism of the Spirit?

-An important actor: the Word

The first and the last word of the fourth chapter put full emphasis on the act of speaking: “as they were speaking” (v.1) and, in v.31, we read: “they were speaking the word of God”. All through these episodes, the announcement of the word meets the hostility of the Jewish leaders who want to stop its spread by imprisoning the apostles, and yet the word makes its own way into the hearts of those who were listening (v.4). The narrative of the trial of the apostles before the Sanhedrin describes the efforts of their opponents who try by every possible means to chain up the word: threats, formal prohibition to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus, but nothing can stop the preaching of the apostles.

In the second part of the narrative, after the freeing of the apostles, the community of believers in prayer “lift their voice to God” (v.24) and call on God’s power to proclaim the word. The word is set free, and, with the movement of the Spirit, all began to announce the word of God with confidence. (v.31)

Having rapidly outlined the structure of the story, with its actors and places, we need to examine more carefully the way the parts of the text are joined together, in order to analyse the structure of the mission of the first witnesses of Christ Jesus and to discover the conditions in which the proclamation of the word could happen.

B. SEPARATING PARTS OF THE TEXT

1.THE TRIAL OF THE APOSTLES PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

In the first part of the fourth chapter (v.1-22) which tells of the arrest and appearance of the apostles Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, we will distinguish three sequences: the first, from verses 1 to 4, sets the scene of the two apostles with the Jewish religious leaders who, annoyed to see them teaching the people, decide on their arrest and imprisonment; verses 5 to 12 describe the first phase of the trial: the presentation of the apostles (5-7) and the speech of Peter (8-12). The third sequence is divided into two parts: the first (v.13-17) tells of the discussion of the Sanhedrin members and their verdict; in 18-22, we are told of the recall of the apostles and hear their reaction to the sentence of the tribunal which forbids them formally to teach the name of Jesus.

-First sequence (v. 1-4)

We enter into the episode of the clash between the apostles and the Jewish religious authorities. The healing of the cripple and the speech of Peter, in Acts 3, mark the opening of a radical dispute over faith in the resurrection. The leaders are “extremely annoyed to see them teaching the people and proclaiming, in the case of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead”. (v.2) The arrival of the priests, accompanied by the officer of the Temple guard and the Sadducees, interrupts the speech of the apostles: they are in the middle of speaking... the use of the absolute genitive in the plural shows clearly the association of the two apostles, although the speech reported in the third chapter may have been from Peter alone, in the court of the Temple, after the healing of the cripple (3:12-26), but Peter does not speak in his own personal name: “Why are you looking at **us**?” (v.12) He speaks in the name of Jesus disciples.

The intervention of the priests and the Sadducees comes from the fear that the word vigorously proclaimed by the apostles might undermine the authority of the religious leaders and become impossible to control, leading the people to believe their testimony. Peter indeed strongly emphasised in his speech: “The prince of life that you killed, God has resurrected him from the dead, and we are witnesses of this.” (3:15) Such a statement arouses fear and trouble, particularly among the Sadducees who are constantly presented as the opponents of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Later the speeches of Paul will arouse similarly conflicts of interpretation between Pharisees and Sadducees on this subject. (Acts 23: 6-8)

The power of the word is on the side of the apostles; they have received the mission of teaching and the object of their speaking is to announce the resurrection of the dead, not in an abstract way, but in its realisation in the person of Jesus (v.2). The conflict becomes inevitable. The Jewish religious authorities are going to use force to fight against the proclamation of the Word. We observe the use of a verb which (in Greek) expresses the idea of hostility, in the sense of throwing oneself on someone, laying hands on someone to control them. Arrested, the apostles are sent to prison, and we can note here the way the verb is used, to underline the importance to the religious leaders of imprisoning Peter and John.(v.3)

The prison becomes the place of silence to which the two apostles are condemned till the next day, and it is also night-time. But in spite of the struggle with the authorities and the obstacles put in the way of the witnesses, the movement of the word continues, escaping every restraint; neither the power of the leaders, nor prison, nor the night can keep the Word captive. “Many of those who had heard the word believed” (v.4) In spite of the apostles being put in shadow, the word keeps on going, making its own way in the hearts of those who listen and welcome it in faith.

-Second sequence (v.5-12)

At the beginning of this sequence, we see a change of time and place. The day following the arrest of Peter and John, all the members of the great Sanhedrin are gathered in Jerusalem. In presenting the framework of the narrative, we underlined the importance of this highly structured group (v. 5-6). Face to face with this group, the two accused are not named, they are designated by a pronoun, they are standing upright, “in the middle” of the carefully organised assembly. It is not the teaching which is in question; the Sanhedrin members want to know how the healing of the cripple was done. The questioning is direct: “By what power, or by what name, have you done that? (v.7) We can note the neutral word, indeterminate, to designate the event which happened in the Temple courtyard, that the tribunal members do

not even specify, but which everyone knows. It is difficult for them to know and to say what exactly has been done. The emphasis put on the personal pronoun (you), reinforcing the verb, expresses the surprise and embarrassment of the Jewish religious authorities: how is it that *you*, insignificant men, have been capable of carrying out this action?

Peter, “filled with the Holy Spirit”, takes the floor. His speech is brief (v. 8-12) Under the impulse of the Spirit, he speaks directly to the people’s leaders and to the Elders (v.8) What he underlines at the outset, is the paradox of the situation: “We, today, we have to reply under the law about a good deed to a cripple.” The apostles have been the instruments of “Salvation” for this man; they have “saved” him. Freed from his infirmity, he recovers what is the most basic good for every human being: good health. The ground for complaint is therefore a good action (v.9). But, more than the man’s healing, what is at the core of the debate, is the means by which the healing has been done.

Verse 10 starts with a vehement challenge from Peter, addressed not only to those seated in the tribunal, but through them to the whole people of Israel. The specific words used imply a wider audience. We are no longer in the frame of the tribunal, everyone is called to listen and to receive what Peter wants to communicate to them: the unique event which has a universal bearing for everyone, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. The apostle wants to convince his audience, shown in the imperative form used: “Know this surely. If this man is standing here healed, states Peter, it is by the name of Jesus, the Christ.”

Peter’s speech is built on an opposition: You/God, the object of which is the name of Jesus. This antithetical structure is found in the first speeches of Acts and especially in that pronounced by Peter before the people, in the courtyard of the Temple: “**God** has glorified his servant Jesus whom **you**, you handed over and whom **you** have rejected”.....”**You**, you accused the Holy one, the Just one....” (3:13-14) “The one whom **you**, you have crucified (4:10), **God** has raised him from the dead.” “**You**”, the leaders of the people and the elders, and indeed, all the people, united in one and the same responsibility, and all those on whom this word of denunciation can have an effect. The act of God is linked to the action of “you” which leads to death. The action of God on the contrary leads to life. The healing of the cripple has been done in the name of Jesus; it is sign of this life.

The insistence of the text on the name is obvious: “It is by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene....it is by his name, and by no other, that this man stands before you healed.”(v.10) In the preceding chapter, in the speech to the people, Peter declared that it was “thanks to faith in this name that the man has been strengthened in his body, re-established in full health” (3:16) The apostles deny being the authors of this healing, they are themselves witnesses of the effects of the name. Their witness is supported by the witness of the Scriptures whose story shows the convergence: “Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, the one that you, you have crucified and that God has raised from the dead, it is he who is the cornerstone...” The verse 22 of Psalm 118, inspired by Isaiah 28:16, used by Luke in the parable of the murderous vinedressers (Luke 20:17), is applied here to the Paschal event: the one who was rejected, God has lifted up; it is he who has become the cornerstone or the keystone.⁶⁵ Verse 12 lays out the universal import of this unique event: “There is not, under heaven, any other name given to men by which we may be saved”, a name which means “God saves”. It must therefore be proclaimed to all.

-Third sequence (v. 13-22)

⁶⁵ Cf. T.O.B .New Testament, Luke 20:17, note S.

We begin the second phase of the trial. In the first place, verses 13 – 17 describe the discussion of the Sanhedrin members following Peter's speech, and their position with regard to the two accused; then, in 18 – 22, the verdict is pronounced, the apostles are forbidden to teach the name of Jesus. They will react and affirm their mission as witnesses.

-First part (v.13-17)

Peter's speech caused astonishment among the Sanhedrin members and leaves them uncertain. This perplexity has two causes: the confidence of the two apostles and the presence with them of the healed cripple. The semantic world that the story attributes to the Jewish religious leaders is shown at the level of knowledge by intelligence and reasoning. They observe, they notice the confidence of Peter and John, men whom they judge and put in the category of people "without education or culture". They know also the group they belong to. They recognize them as "those who-were-with-Jesus". (v.13) They see the healed man standing upright beside them. (v.14) The state of this cripple that they used to know and whose healing wrought by the apostles they cannot now deny is a clear, obvious sign, known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem (v.18) Before such a situation, the Sanhedrin members are left wordless. They have nothing to reply (v.14). In fact, the situation is paradoxical: on the one hand "uneducated, uncultured" men speak out before the Jewish religious authorities and express themselves with such confidence that everyone is astonished; and on the other hand, the Jewish leaders, the Elders and the scribes are reduced to silence. Such a contrast is a sign of the word itself. The word lives in the apostles, and nothing and no one can stop its power.

Verse 15 marks a movement in the assembly: the accused are taken out of the Sanhedrin and the deliberation of the tribunal members begins. This opens with an acknowledgement of their perplexity: "What are we going to do with these men?" The event which focuses all the attention of the judges is the clear and evident sign of the healing of the cripple.

The Greek word translated by "sign" is used to designate, in the religious sense, "a recognizable wonderful action which is proof for everyone". Among the prophets, the "sign" is the proof that a message really comes from God (Isaiah 38:7-8). It is used in the New Testament "as designating a miracle and keeps its value of demonstrating meaning."⁶⁶ In our text, the witness of the apostles is supported by the evident sign of the healing of the cripple, but they do not consider themselves as the direct authors of the healing, they are witnesses of it just as much as those who saw the man walk and jump, going into the Temple. (3:8) Their witness is rooted before everything else in their faith in Christ risen, recognized as present and in whose name, health has been restored to this man.

Now, a "sign" can sometimes arouse only astonishment or emotion, even admiration, without the witnesses being stirred to trust and faith. This is what happens with the Sanhedrin members. They saw with their own eyes the undeniable sign of the healing of the cripple, but they are not able to get to the level of faith which would allow them to discern the authenticity of the mission of the two apostles and the truth of their teaching. And yet, because they fear the reaction of the people, already favourable, might spread even more widely, they find only one solution: prevent the mission of the apostles by condemning them to silence:

"Stop them, by threats, from speaking henceforth to anyone at all in that name!"
(v.17) A name that they themselves refuse even to pronounce.

⁶⁶ C.Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, p.1385 f

-Second part (v.18-22)

The recall of the two accused, in verse 18, introduces the last phase of the trial. The Sanhedrin members communicate the verdict: absolute ban on the apostles to say any word or to teach the name of Jesus. The speech focuses on the word, but by a reversal of roles, it is the men condemned to silence who, paradoxically, take the initiative in the debate.

The ban on speaking, to utter a sound, is infringed on the spot by Peter and John. They reply. They question and throw out a challenge to their judges. They, “uneducated, uncultured men”, with a surprising frankness, invite the Sanhedrin members to judge what is just in the eyes of God (v.18). We find again here the opposition “you/God”. “Which is right? To obey you judges, or to obey God?” God is the great invisible, but present, witness, and it is in God that they find the strength to bear witness. Faithful to their mission, they show themselves as witnesses and servants of the word: “We, we cannot not speak of what we have seen and heard.”(v.20) The use of the pronoun reinforces the verbs which express this strong conviction: “We cannot, we, not speak...”

They are witnesses of Jesus, the Christ, witnesses of his life and of his death, witnesses of a word event that they cannot not proclaim. Seized by the energy of the word, they attest that God has raised him from the dead and they now see the power of his Name which acts in the healing of the cripple, a name which carries a mysterious strength. The people, they also, through this sign of healing of a man whose age is specified in the text – “more than forty years of age” – recognize the power of God at work, and all glorify God (v.22). All the efforts of the Jewish religious authorities do not manage to imprison the Word.

2. THE WORD SET FREE

We can turn now to reading the second part of the fourth chapter of Acts (v.23-31) which brings to the stage the group of the apostles and the first believers and describes their prayer. We will analyse it in two sequences: v.23-28 and v. 29-31.

-First sequence (v.23-28)

After having been threatened again and forbidden to speak in the Name of Jesus, Peter and John are freed since the Sanhedrin members are incapable of finding a means of punishing them and that they fear especially the reactions of the people (v.21). Immediately on being free, the apostles go to “their own group” (v.23). The Greek adjective means who belongs in particular to someone or something. In this text, we find it in the form of a noun; when it applies to persons, it designates those who are personally attached to someone. We can think that it designates here the apostles and disciples of Jesus and the community of believers.

All this sequence is under the sign of the word. Peter and John begin by recounting all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them during their trial before the Sanhedrin (v.23). All listening to this account, those close to the apostles lift up to God their thanksgiving: they lift their voice to God. The prayer comes forth from the event. The community of believers recognizes the presence and action of God who has allowed the apostles, thanks to the power of the word which lives in them, to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ dead, risen and alive. Not only is the prayer in relationship to God, but it is also in relationship to the brothers and sisters, it is the expression of the whole community which in one single impulse expresses to God its thanks and thus translates their unanimity in communion. (v.24)

This prayer, described as “first liturgical prayer in the book of the Acts” has, according to some commentators, the schema of a celebration.⁶⁷ It opens with an invocation to God Master of creation, Master of life. The use of Psalm 146 which evokes the whole cosmos as the place of creation proclaims the Lordship of God over the world and lets human beings give glory to the Creator.

“It is you who made heaven and earth, the sea and all they contain.” (v.24)

Then the prayer of the believers calls on the very word of God, this word which borrows, we can say, two “voices” to speak (v.25).

In the Jerusalem Bible, J. Dupont notes that this text is altered, and the translation uncertain. He proposes the following translation: “It is you who said, by the Holy Spirit and by the mouth of our father David, your servant...” Now the Greek text has no co-ordination. The complement, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, is held in the body of the sentence. Literally, we could read this verse thus: you who have spoken, you who have put these words, by the Holy Spirit, in the mouth of our father David, your servant. David is the instrument that God, by the Holy Spirit, uses to express his word. The words of Psalm 2, quoted in Acts 4:25-26, are Word of God for the community of believers; reread in the light of the paschal event, they take on a new resonance.

The reading of the Greek text shows clearly the parallelism in the construction of the two verses 26 and 27. Verse 27 begins with a verb which serves as pivot of the sentence, reinforced by the use of an affirmative formula: “yes, in truth they met together”, and echoes verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 2.

All the elements of the preceding verse are taken up again in a parallel structure. The group of subject-words are found again in v.27: Herod and Pontius Pilate represent the kings and the leaders who are in league against the Lord; the “pagan” nations and the people of Israel take up again the two terms of verse 1 of the psalm. We can notice the same parallelism in the complementary group. Just as the nations, the peoples, the kings and the leaders were in league against the Lord and against his anointed, in the same way the events which have just taken place in Jerusalem saw the alliance of the authorities, Herod and Pilate, joined with the pagan nations and to the people of Israel against Jesus. Another analogy appears evident between the two terms “his anointed” and your holy servant Jesus whom you have anointed.

This parallelism gives to the events lived through by the apostles and the community of believers a new meaning, in the light of the Scriptures. “The faith of the disciples was formed on the basis and the model of their former Jewish faith”, Hence it is “logical that they turn to the Old Testament.”⁶⁸ The collusion hatched against the Lord is clarified in the reading of the psalm attributed to David, a word inspired by the Holy Spirit. The understanding of what happened to Jesus is linked to the discovery of the divine plan, which God had determined beforehand. The apostles and the community of believers thus see in the forces allied against the Christ Jesus and against the emerging Church, the instruments of God’s plan. The prayer of the community is recognition of the work of God, symbolised by two signs, “your hand and your advice or your will”. God, in his power and his wisdom, knew beforehand the accomplishment of Salvation by his servant Jesus, the Christ Messiah.

-Second sequence (v.29-31)

After recognizing in the light of the Scriptures, the fulfilment of God’s plan, accomplished in spite of all the opposing forces, and having affirmed its faith in Jesus, the Christ, the

⁶⁷ See D.Rimaud, The First Liturgical prayer in the Book of Acts, in the review *Maison-Dieu* No.51, 1957 p. 99-115, quoted in *Cahier Evangile* No.21

⁶⁸

community of believers continues its prayer by presenting to God the present situation: “ And now, Lord...”(v.29). The prayer is rooted in the concrete reality of life, and this reality, for the apostles and the whole community, is to continue their mission as witnesses of the resurrection.

The prayer of petition is expressed around two imperative verbs. The first, meaning “keep your eyes on, observe”, is an appeal that God pay attention to the threats of their opponents, of which the apostles Peter and John have just had the experience. The second names the desire of the apostles and the believing community:

“Allow us your servants to speak your message with all boldness”. (v.29)

The apostles do not ask to be freed from the threats and obstacles which hinder their mission; what they want is to be able to announce the word of God with full confidence.

The Greek term *parrhesia*, in ordinary speech, means the right to make known one’s thought, the right to say everything and, following on from that, the sign of political freedom. In the Gospels, this term is used exclusively in connection with Jesus (except in John 7: 13). Christ Jesus, Word made flesh, can affirm that he has always announced the word of God with confidence.

“I have always spoken publicly to everyone” (John 18:20) ⁶⁹

This free speech, this plain speaking, becomes an apostolic virtue for Jesus’ disciples. In the book of Acts, we find twelve times the use of the noun: *parrhesia* and of the derived verb, including three times in the fourth chapter (Acts 4:13, 29, 31) ⁷⁰ The freedom to speak, to announce the word of God is of capital importance for the mission; the apostles want it to be total; whatever the circumstances, they do not ask God to eliminate the obstacles on their path. Servants of the Word, convinced of the truth of their message, they want to announce the word of God in complete independence, free in the face of the authorities on the spot and of the weight of the institutions which could hinder their missionary impetus.

In verse 30, the prayer of the community finishes with an appeal to the power of God, asking God to “stretch out your hand”. This power of God, symbolised by the hand, is made real by exterior and tangible actions: healings, signs and wonders. The apostles do not ask for signs which would come to prove their teaching; the action of the Lord must be perceived, above all, to give credit to their mission of preaching the word. The mission is not only announcing the word, but also action and bearing witness. All through his ministry, Jesus “taught in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and healing every sickness.” (Matt. 4: 23-24), thus giving the witness of the works accomplished according to the will of the Father. (John 5:36). He had associated his apostles, from their very first mission, with his power of healing sicknesses (Matt. 10:1). When the disciples of Jesus pray God to manifest God’s power, they are not asking for a magical power. It is nothing to do with having recourse to signs and wonders operated by some mysterious force, but what is important in their eyes is the power of the Name of Jesus and the reality of his resurrection which must be revealed in the mission of the first witnesses and of all the messengers of the Gospel.

The prayer is completed by a manifestation of the Spirit, described in verse 31; in this brief text, we find again some elements of which the analogy of those in the story of the first

⁶⁹ C.Spicq, op.cit. p.1188f

⁷⁰ Cf Bible Concordance N.T. Cerf 1970, p.419. To persuade – confidence - dare

Pentecost is clearly apparent (Acts 2:1-4) All are gathered in one place; natural phenomena accompany the arrival of the Spirit: “a noise like that of a strong wind fills the house” (2:2), “the place where they were was shaken” (4:31). We can read, in this shaking, the sign of the turning upside down which is happening in the life of the witnesses of Christ Jesus. All filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4; 4:31), receive the strength to announce the word of God with confidence (4:31). In order to assume their mission, the apostles and the witnesses of the Gospel are not left to their own human strengths, they carry out their task in the movement of the Spirit. All the opposing forces, leaders of the priests and elders, members of the Sanhedrin, hostiles to their preaching, are powerless to reduce the energy and the expansion of the new faith: “with great power, the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and they all enjoyed rich blessings.” (4:33)

SECOND CHAPTER

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

MISSION, A TRINITARIAN EVENT

The study of the overall organisation of the fourth Chapter of Acts and the analysis of some of the key words of this text allow us to look now at the main themes which throw light on the source and the structure of the apostolic **MISSION** as it was first proclaimed.

If mission is the faith announced, proclaimed, communicated, what is the message of the apostles whose irreplaceable witness is based on the direct knowledge of the one whom they announce? The Messiah promised by God and announced by the prophets to the Jewish people, they recognize him in the person of Jesus, the Nazarene, whom they have known and in whom, in faith, they discover the “Holy one”, the “Just one”, the “Servant of God”, the “Anointed”. But these titles which tell the identity of Jesus, the One Sent by the Father, do not express the whole of the Mission, which is not only the content of a message, but also power of the Word and of the Name. We need to discern, at the very heart of the lived experience of the apostles, the clear outlines of the message of Salvation in Jesus Christ dead, risen and glorified, whose name becomes source of power and of life, and whose incarnate word supports the faith of the witnesses, sent to proclaim to all, in the impulse of the Spirit, the energy of the resurrection.

Listening to these first witnesses, we will organise our theological reflection around three main axes: the **Name**, the **Word** incarnate and the **Sending** in the strength of the Spirit.

A. SALVATION, IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

While reading the third and fourth chapters of the Acts, we noted the importance of the Name in the original witness of the apostles. Witnesses as also instruments of the healing of the cripple, the apostles must recognize the power of the name of Jesus at work, power which would have no effect if it did not encounter faith in the person of Jesus. Starting with this reflection, we will try to see how Salvation in the name of the Lord Jesus is a “trinitarian act”.⁷¹

1. THE POWER OF THE NAME

The healing of the cripple, carried out in the name of the Lord Jesus, reveals the power of this name whose effects on the body we can ascertain in the first place. At Peter’s call “In the Name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, walk” (3:6), the healing is instantaneous:

“That very instant, the feet and ankles of the man grew strong, with one jump he was on his feet and walking. He went into the Temple, walking, jumping and praising God.”

(3:7-8)

The very expressive anatomical precisions of Luke’s text underline the physical transformation of this man, “crippled from his mother’s womb” (3:2). His feet and ankles grew firm, made strong and vigorous, to the point that the man crippled from birth is able to stand up. The man is freed from the forces which impeded his movements, “with one jump, he was upright and walking”. (3:8)

The upright stance belongs to the very structure of human existence. This position is seen by anthropologists as “the beginning of a liberation from the forces of nature.” It is the stance of a living person and symbolises “victory and self-transcendence”.⁷² In the narrative of the healing of the cripple, the verbs of movement, get up, walk, jump, strongly express the change brought about in this man.

The paralysed man was lying in the position which symbolises sleep, death; the Name of Jesus “wakens” him. The Greek verb, used traditionally in the New Testament to designate the resurrection, is used in verse 7 to describe the movement of the cripple, whose “right hand Peter grasped” to make him stand up, to put him upright, in the posture of a living person. The Christ Jesus whom God has raised from the dead is source of life. The power of his Name gives to the cripple the strength, not only to get up, to walk, but even more to jump. There is in this movement a sign of freedom, of expansion of life which surpasses itself.

To this physical transcendence is added the movement towards God. The cripple, restored to health and to the total autonomy of his movements, enters the Temple, praising God. The story depicts well the joy of this man who “gets up” to praise God. We find again the symbolism of standing tall which not only characterizes the position of the man upright, but also “frames his soaring in a religious sense, because God or the divine offers a fullness which lifts the human being beyond”.⁷³ The place of the encounter between human and God is the body; hence the return to physical health becomes the sign of something much more precious, Salvation. His entry into the Temple symbolises his entry into a new life.

⁷¹ Expression borrowed from B. Sesboue, *Jesus Christ, the Unique Mediator*. T 2 Desclee 1991, p.248

⁷² A.Vergote. *op.cit.* p.108

⁷³ A.Vergote, *op.cit.* p.110

This instantaneous healing which the crowd witnessed beside the Temple, allows Peter to explain more about the meaning of the miracle worked in the name of Jesus. It is Jesus who is present and who acts through the intermediary of the apostles, when they call on his Name. So that there may be no ambiguity, Peter states strongly, it is neither by their power nor by their personal holiness that the apostles have worked this miracle. (3:12) Later on, in the presence of another paralysed person, at Lydda, Peter himself declares in calling him by his name, for the name opens to the relationship with the other person and with God: "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you, get up and make your bed" (Acts 9:34), inviting the man to take charge of his own life.

The question addressed to the apostles by the members of the Sanhedrin clearly indicates ⁷⁴the notion of power attributed to the Name: "By what power or in what name have you done that, you people?" (4:7) Behind this healing, they suppose a mysterious authority at work. We have noted, in the analysis of the text, the imperative formula used by Peter in the face of the religious authorities he takes to witness:

"Know this all of you, if this man is standing healed in front of you, it is by the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, it is through his Name and through no other..... (4:10) The sign of health restored to the paralysed man becomes the definitive and absolute sign of Salvation in the resurrection of Jesus.

2. FAITH IN THE NAME

But the power of the Name of Jesus is not a magical power; without faith, it would not work. When Jesus healed the sick, he appealed to their faith. In his speech to the people, Peter insists on the connection between the human experience of healing and the faith. He specifies therefore that this name is source of strength and that it is the foundation of the faith:

"Through faith in this Name, to this man whom you see and know, this very Name has given strength, and it is faith in it, which before all of you, has brought him back to full health." (3:16)

Health (the salvation of the body) is the sign of a higher gift, it is the Salvation of the whole human being and of every human being, it is life; and the gift of life is therefore linked to faith in the Name of Christ Jesus. In reading this verse there is a question: who believes? Is it the cripple whose faith is implicated in his hope of healing (3:5)? Is it Peter through whom this first miracle is worked? The T.O.B. translates the Greek expression by "thanks to it" (rather than "in it"); "it" refers perhaps to the name, but more probably to Jesus: the faith which has healed the man would therefore be that of Jesus.⁷⁵ Whatever interpretation one adopts, one thing is evident: the Name cannot be separated from the person.

-Can we speak of faith in a name?

Faith in the "Name" cannot be faith in an abstract entity, in a mysterious force, it is to believe in a person. If the Name of Jesus is capable of giving life to a human being, to bring him to a new life, it is because of the close identification of the name with the person. As we have seen in reading Hilary of Poitiers "the name designates the secret nature of a being,

⁷⁵ T.O.B. New Testament, p.374 Notes

not in virtue of a definition, but because it contains a sort of active presence. Where the Name is, there is the person.”⁷⁶

In the Old Testament tradition, when we speak of “Name” without other specification, we know that it can only refer to God. The absolute use of the “Name” is characteristic of Jewish religious language. The “Name” is sufficient to designate YHWH, a Name which is not to be pronounced. During the theophany of the burning bush, God called Moses by his name and God gave him God’s own Name. God is the one who “is with”, God reveals Godself as “the one who saves”. God manifests Godself and gives Godself for the Salvation of God’s people.

(Exodus 3:14-15) In “giving over” God’s Name, God “gives over” personally Godself.

The book of Acts, faithful to this tradition, gives to the Name of Jesus a function of the first order. To believe in the “Name”, is to adhere to the person of Jesus; the Name of Christ Jesus gives access to his person, to his unique individuality: “it is the person of Jesus who constitutes from now on the mystery of the presence of God among human beings”.⁷⁷

3. THE NAME, SOURCE OF SALVATION

If the idea of a God who saves is common to all religions, it is a fundamental element of the faith of Israel: the Salvation of humanity is God and God alone. In ancient Judaism the title of “Saviour” was reserved to YHWH and, for each believing Israelite as much as for all the people, the Name of YHWH was source of Salvation. Confronted by the Jewish religious authorities of Jerusalem, the apostles Peter and John affirm their faith in the Name of Jesus, a name whose etymology means “YHWH saves”. If the Name of YHWH was source of Salvation for the people of Israel, the Salvation, in the new Alliance, is carried out henceforth around the Name of Christ Jesus, the One Sent from the Father and God’s own Son: the unique Name by which we can be saved:

“In all the world there is no other name through whom we can be saved”

(Acts 4:12)

This key phrase, in Peter’s declaration before the Sanhedrin, echoes his speech on the day of Pentecost, and throws light on the saving significance of the Name, announced by the prophet Joel:

“And whoever then invokes the Name of the Lord will be saved”.

(Acts 2:21/Joel 3:5)

The apostles proclaim with confidence therefore their faith: Jesus Christ saves us, he is the only one who saves us, Salvation is found in no other. Such is the newness of God who saves in Jesus Christ.

-What is Salvation?

Although the title of “Saviour” is rare enough in the New Testament, we find it in Acts 5:31, when Peter declares, during their second appearance before the Sanhedrin: “God has raised

⁷⁶ A.M.Besnard, op.cit p.21

⁷⁷ Cf. Concordance of the Bible – New Testament- “Save-Deliver” p.494-95

him up.....making him leader and Saviour”. Paul at Pisidian Antioch, retracing the whole history of the people of Israel, can, in his turn, affirm: “God has raised up for Israel Jesus as “Saviour” (Acts 13:23). On the other hand the frequency of the verb “to save” (108 times) and of the term “Salvation” (45 times) shows the centrality of the theme of Salvation in the early preaching.⁷⁸

The narrative of the healing of the cripple, in Acts 3, allows us to deepen the notion of Salvation which, from the semantic ambiguity of the term, needs some clarification. This notion, indeed, has two aspects.

On the one hand, to be saved is to be freed from evil, from suffering, from every situation of distress; for the cripple, Salvation has a bodily dimension; Salvation is health, the most elementary good for every human being. If, on the other hand, we seek to characterise what Salvation means for every person, we always find the term “life”. To be saved is to live, to live fully and forever. Such is the desire which dwells in every human being. God is the “Living One”, God is fullness of life; the human being is said to be “living” to the extent that he or she is made a participant in the life of God. Thus, the cripple brought back to full health can enter into a new life and be open to a life of relationship with God and with others: he hangs onto the steps of the disciples, he goes into the Temple and shouts his joy and thanksgiving. The sign of health restored to the paralysed man becomes the sign of an even more precious gift: Salvation in the Name of Jesus Risen, come to reveal to us the life of communion which unites him to the Father, in the Spirit. Every human being is called to participate in the life of God in Jesus Christ, that is precisely what the good news of Salvation revealed and accomplished in Jesus Christ means to us.⁷⁹

-Salvation, “a trinitarian act”

The first speeches of Acts express the fundamental certainty living in the heart of the believers: Salvation is a gift of God, revealed and accomplished in Jesus Christ. In order to discover all the depth of Peter’s proclamation in Acts 4:12: “There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved...”, it is enlightening to reread his speech on Pentecost day, when the apostle retraces what happened to Jesus, the Nazarene, in his life and his death:

“This man whose divine authority was clearly proven to you by all the miracles and wonders which God performed through him, here among you...In accordance with his own plan God had already decided that Jesus would be handed over to you and you killed him... but God raised him....

God has raised this very Jesus from death, and we are all witnesses to this fact. He has been raised to the right side of God and has received from him, the Father, the Holy Spirit, as he had promised, and has poured it out.....

God has made Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

(Acts 2:22-24; 32-36)

Peter’s profession of faith puts the spotlight on the plan of God in the story of Salvation: Salvation in Jesus Christ “draws its origin from the Father; it is carried into effect in the Son; it is completed in the invisible gift of the Spirit”.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Cf Concordance of the Bible – New Testament – “Save -Liberate”, p.494-95

⁷⁹ Cf B. Sesboue Jesus Christ, the Unique Mediator, op cit. p.17-26

⁸⁰ B.Sesboue The Narratives of Salvation op.cit p.248-249,

In faith Peter recognizes that Jesus is the Sent One of God, the one to whom God has given “credentials” (that we might believe/trust in him), and through whom God has worked signs and wonders in the middle of the people of Israel (2:22). This man who went about doing good has been condemned by men and handed over to death. But, for the disciples, these events happened according to the plan that God, in power and wisdom, had prepared and determined beforehand (:23;4:28) and that God’s hand is carrying out (4:28-30).

Jesus the servant of God, “God has raised him”, “we are all witnesses of this”, Peter proclaims (2:32). The resurrection reveals a fundamental name of God: “The one who has raised up Jesus from death”. (3:15; 4:10) The existential relationship which unites Jesus to his Father finds its summit in the paschal mystery: the gift of the cross is the gift of the Son to the Father, and the gift of the resurrection is the absolute gift of the Father to the Son. Thus, we can describe the cross as “space of sonship” and the resurrection as “field of fatherhood”, according to the expressions of G. Lafont.⁸¹ “If Jesus manifested the mystery of his sonship in death, it is not to constitute God as Father, but truly because God, from always, “was” Father, and he, Jesus, Son. In death, Jesus is equal to the Name that he bears and thus bears witness to God-Father; at the resurrection, God also is equal to God’s own Name and thus gives witness to God-Son.”⁸²

The Name reveals the filial identity constitutive of the person of Christ Jesus and the naming of Jesus as Son is attributed to God: “God has made him Lord and Christ” (2:36). “Raised up by the right hand of God....” (2:33), according to the word of Psalm 110. In the speech of Paul at Pisidian Antioch, the quote from Psalm 2 presents the resurrection of Jesus as an act of filiation: “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” (Acts 13:33) Such statements signify the equality between Jesus and God. The disciples discover the messiahship and the divine sonship of Jesus, when they have understood, in faith, how the resurrection overcame the scandal of the cross. Thus the resurrection reveals the mystery of the eternal relationship of Father and Son.

The title of “Servant of God” used four times in Acts 3:13, 26;4:27,30, places Jesus in his relationship to the father, in total communion with him, in an attitude of obedience and surrender. Jesus, the One Sent from the Father, Word made flesh, has taken on totally the human condition until death. There exists an unbreakable unity between the incarnation and the paschal mystery. Because he is the very Son of God, Jesus carries out the irrevocable gift of God to human beings, and because he is truly human, he carries out the irrevocable gift of humanity to God.⁸³ It is because of this double solidarity with God and with humanity that Christ Jesus has lived out in his flesh the event of Salvation. If Jesus risen is “Saviour”, it is because he is the first of the “saved”, “the first-born from death”. (Col. 1:18) Son of God from all eternity, Jesus has assumed his life as a Servant, going as far as the total “Kenosis” that the hymn in Philippians 2:6-11 underlines, and that is why God has glorified him:

“Therefore God has **raised** him up and has given him **THE NAME**
which is above every name, so that all may bend the knee at the Name

⁸¹ G. Lafont, op cit, p 255

⁸² Ibid. p.260

⁸³ B.Sesboue, Jesus-Christ, the Unique Mediator, op. cit. p. 108-109

of Jesus, and that every tongue should proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father....”

Revealed and named as Son of God in glory, Christ Jesus receives in his humanity the gifts of the divine Lordship, as he shares with the Father the divine condition. That is why he receives the Name which is above every name.

This Name becomes the heart of the kerygma, the source of Salvation for all humanity. The proclamation of the first disciples rejoins that of Jesus himself expressing, on the eve of his passion, the essence of his mission:

“I have revealed your Name to the men..... (John 17:6)

Holy Father, keep them in your Name that you have given me

That they may be One as we are One.” (John 17:11)

Echoing the prayer of Jesus, the first ending of John’s Gospel, makes a link between faith in the Name and life:

“These (the signs) have been written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him You may have Life in his Name.” (John 20:31)

The issue is to discover, through the signs of the life and the mission of Jesus, narrated by the gospel, the person of Christ. The object of faith is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God; and to believe that Jesus is the Son, is to recognize that his Name reveals his filial identity. Faith in the Name of Christ Jesus becomes source of life and of Salvation for the believer. The gift of life is therefore linked to faith in the Name, and this life in the Christ, Word of life, dead and risen, gives the believer existence and access in a vital and existential way to the very mystery of the life of God.

In showing himself to be Son, Jesus reveals that “Father” is the name which expresses most profoundly the being of God. The mystery of the divine sonship unveils the deep meaning of the human being created in the image of God. Because Jesus is Son of God, as a man he reveals in the human being his filial structure. Human beings are to recognize themselves around a name, the Name of Jesus, a Name which is above every name. The Name of Jesus is the simplest name; it is no longer question of prestigious titles: King, Messiah ..., but of the name which is the nearest to what cannot be expressed: his unique individuality. And this Name becomes the sacrament of the presence of God at the heart of human history. It is because they are daughters and sons of human beings that humans are called to become daughters and sons of God, in relationship with the Father.

If Salvation in Jesus Christ finds its origin in the Father and receives its visible realisation in the mission of the Son of God, come to reveal to human beings, by his life, his death and his resurrection, the Name of the Father and the mystery of his being, it finds its fulfilment in the gift of the Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit “completes the trinitarian revelation and makes of Salvation a trinitarian act”.⁸⁴ The resurrection is a trinitarian act. As Peter’s speech affirms, the Father raises the Son by giving him the Spirit: “Lifted up by the right hand of God”, Christ Jesus “received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and he has poured it out”. (Acts 2 :32)

⁸⁴ B. Sesboue, *The Narratives of Salvation*. op.cit. p.248

We cannot conceive of the relationship of Jesus to his Father without their mutual relationship to the Spirit. In the paschal event just as all through his life and his mission, the Spirit lives in Jesus, he is anointed by the Spirit at his baptism, (Luke 3:22), he carries out his mission in the strength of the Spirit (Luke 4:24): as Peter, in the home of the centurion Cornelius, recalls:

“God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power.” (Acts 10:38)

This energy of the Spirit which lives in Christ Jesus shows his power as Saviour. Because he is in his own person, God and man, it is in and by his humanity that Jesus, dead and risen, gives the Spirit from the Father and pours it out on saved humanity. As B. Sesboue writes: “The Spirit given by the Son to the Father, the Spirit given by the Father to the Son, to return life to his body of flesh, becomes, according to Jesus’ promise, the common gift of the Father and the Son to human beings.”⁸⁵ The Spirit poured out through the mystery of the Pasch of Christ Jesus opens onto a new life, the participation in the very life of God which is communion of the Father and of the Son in the Spirit.

Here we find again some of the key ideas of Hilary of Poitiers writing. Salvation for a human being is to enter a life of full communion with God, to participate in the eternal life of God revealed in Jesus Christ, life in fullness. The Son of God, Word made flesh, “has come so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life, and that the world might be saved by him”. (John 3:16-17) Peter’s speech rejoins the Johannine message: “There is no other Name under heaven by which we can be saved”. (Acts 4:12) This Name is at the heart of the proclamation of the mystery of Salvation to which the apostles must bear witness in their mission.

B. PROCLAIMING THE WORD

The event of Salvation only becomes accessible through the word of witnesses. The apostles received the mission of proclaiming the Good News of Salvation and of making known the Name of the Lord Jesus. They saw the power of his Name, a name bearer of a mysterious energy which worked the healing of the cripple. In essence their mission consists in speaking in this Name, in teaching the only Name which can be source of salvation for every human being. At the heart of the human world, they are called to discover the energy of the incarnate Word which is power of Salvation and promise of life, in the revelation of the mystery of God Trinity.

1. SPEAK IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

In the analysis of Acts 4:1 – 31, we noted that the first and the last verses put a spotlight on the act of speaking: “....they were still speaking” (4:1) “...they spoke the message of God”

⁸⁵ Ibid p.249

(4:31). The apostles Peter and John speak, but not in their own name. Invested with a mission, they are conscious of being the spokespersons of someone invisible, absent, but of whom they can affirm, in faith, the existence, the presence: Christ Jesus. In him and through him, the Word of God is at work, bringing about Salvation.

“Speak in the name of”, “be the spokesperson”, does not mean that the apostles take on the relay from Jesus and repeat his speeches. It is the Word which takes hold of them, which speaks in them, as powerful as it was in Jesus. As the Father spoke and acted in Jesus, it is He who speaks and acts in his witnesses, granting them to do the same works as himself “and even greater” (John 14:10-12). They are invaded by the Word of another whose power and effects they recognize, with such an energy that they speak “in the name of Jesus” as in their own name and declare themselves powerless to keep the Word silent: “...we cannot not speak” (4:20). This need to speak is not born of a human will; the Word is a dynamic reality which stirs up in them the energy of speaking, of making known “what they have seen and heard”.

-What have they seen? What have they heard?

The apostles were witnesses of the events which marked the mission of Christ Jesus, from his baptism by John up to his ascension; and the central event to which they attest with all their faith is that of their meeting with Christ risen. Although they were not eyewitnesses of the moment when Jesus came back from death, they can however affirm that they have seen the risen Lord, and the resurrection becomes the focal point of their preaching. They protest their certainty and the truthfulness of their words: we would not be proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, if we were not certain, and we are certain of it because we saw him alive after his death. “There would not have been “witness” properly speaking, but simple proclamation, if it had not included the affirmation “because he showed himself”. God made it possible to show himself....” (Acts 10:40) ⁸⁶

The paschal experience that Peter proclaims on the day of Pentecost and in his speeches before the people and before the Sanhedrin, after the healing of the cripple, is equally at the heart of the preaching of Paul who can declare to the Jews:

“It is to you that the message of Salvation was sent...We announce to you the Good News, the promise made to our fathers, God has fulfilled for us, to us, their children, God has raised up Jesus.” (Acts 13: 26, 32-33)

Christ risen and glorified is the keystone of all the apostolic preaching:

“The one who was rejected, God has raised him up, he is the one who has become the most important of all.” (4:11)

Now this witness is entrusted to the apostles as a mission: “...he commanded us” (10:42) and this order of mission states clearly that they are constituted witnesses of Christ, not only of an important past event, but witnesses of the new identity of Jesus risen, witnesses of what no one has ever seen. What the apostles have seen and heard does not refer to a “once upon a time” or to a mythical person, but to Jesus the Nazarene with whom they have lived, whose teaching they have heard and whose miracles they have seen. Their mission as witnesses of the resurrection is not limited to telling what they have seen and heard, it calls

⁸⁶ Cf J. Moingt, op cit p. 341-342

upon them to retransmit the revelation that they have received from the Word of God. "Like the prophets, the apostles are not only witnesses of a visual fact, but of a spoken event... Their mission of "witness" and that of "prophet" cannot be disassociated from the "seeing" and "hearing" which constitute this unique mission".⁸⁷ Jesus is risen, he is alive, and it is in the "today" of their mission that they see and hear what the power of his Name and the energy of his Word are working before their eyes. They see the power of the Name of Christ Jesus at work in the healing of the cripple, they consider themselves as the servants of a Word which does not come from them and whose energy they discover. That is why the apostles call on everyone, inviting all to recognize what is being done among them, and of which they themselves can be the witnesses, in order to confess, in faith, that Jesus is Lord and Saviour.

2. "TEACH THE NAME"

The preaching of the apostles arouses the anxiety and exasperation of the Jewish religious leaders who fear the power of the Word and want to keep it dammed up. "Furious to see" these unlearned and untrained men "teaching the people", they had forbidden them "to teach the Name" of Jesus (4:2, 18), prohibition which they recalled at their second appearance before the Sanhedrin:

"We had formally forbidden you to teach that Name, and here you are filling Jerusalem with your teaching". (5:28)

The proclamation of the Word becomes teaching, a teaching which is not the fruit of their learning, but of their confidence in the faith. As Jesus himself, according to John's gospel, proclaimed the Word and said what the Father had taught him (John 7:16), stating that his teaching is not his, but from the one who sent him (John 7:16), the disciples in their turn are going to transmit a message which does not come from them. When we observe the position of the two groups there, we can notice that they are not placed in the same perspective. Their approaches diverge and lead to a misunderstanding between them. The Jewish religious leaders speak of "teaching" which is taught according to clearly determined rules and that could not be altered, and the apostles are invested by the energy of the Word that they proclaim "with confidence". Faced by a fixed, rigid teaching, the Word is alive and active. In the eyes of the witnesses of Christ Jesus, the mission is defined more by the energy of the transmission of the Word than by the content of a doctrine that is taught. The mission of the apostles consists in transmitting the word that they have heard, in proclaiming everywhere the message of Salvation in Jesus Christ. The Jewish authorities wanted to imprison the Word of God by shutting up the apostles, but, scarcely set free, these take up again their preaching, obedient to the call of the Lord's angel whose function is not to communicate information, but to indicate the transmission of the word of life:

"Go, stand in the Temple, and there proclaim to the people all these words of life. They obeyed and, from early dawn, went to the Temple to teach." (5: 20-21)

It would be interesting to follow the mission of Paul, "persecutor of the Name", who becomes in his turn, a chosen instrument to "carry the Name of the Lord Jesus before the pagans, kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15) We would notice that the ministry of the word referred to Paul and to his companions "who have dedicated their life to the

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.343-344

Name of the Lord Jesus" (15: 26), follows the same criteria, but such an investigation would go beyond the limits of this work.

The certitude that Peter expresses before the Sanhedrin: "There is no other Name under heaven given to men and women..." (4: 12) and which he takes up again in his speech at Cornelius' house: "It is to him that all the prophets bear this witness that whoever believes in him will receive, by his Name, the forgiveness of sins" (10: 43), establishes a very strong connection between Salvation and the Name. The confidence of the apostles does not come from themselves, they speak in the Name of the Lord Jesus, but their mission is not limited to speaking in the Name of Jesus Christ or to giving a teaching which would be centred on the resurrection of Christ, their ministry is essentially a service of the word whose effects they can discover at the heart of the human community.

To be "at the service of the word" does not simply mean, according to the most usual interpretation, to communicate a message, but it is to be attentive to the work of the word. Through the witnesses, rather than at their own initiative, the word unfurls its course and is at work in the life of human beings. So the missionaries, in presenting the Name of the Lord Jesus, must be attentive to what is being lived out in the human community. They must discern the secret work of the word in the heart of those who are listening and welcome it. God bears witness, by the mouth of the witnesses, to the power of the Name and the energy of the Word which often go before them, a word which is in suffering in the world of human beings, and which must be set free.

3. THE ENERGY OF THE WORD AND ITS PATHWAY

The apostles' preaching, in its first examples, does not consist in transmitting a programme of teaching or in communicating a method of evangelisation, it is above all "service of the word" (Acts 6: 4) which is by itself energy of Salvation. The apostles had to discover the energy of the word at work in the human community and to follow its pathway which met welcome or refusal and opens to missionaries new areas of evangelisation.

-the energy of the word

The first speeches of Peter bear witness to the energy of the word living in the disciples themselves and which gives them the courage to take up their mission of witnesses. In spite of oppositions and obstacles, they proclaim "with confidence" the good news of Salvation. Nothing succeeds in controlling this energy; neither the imprisonment of the apostles, nor the threats of the Sanhedrin members can stop its expansion. The prison, place of silence and darkness, cannot keep captive the word. While the disciples of Christ Jesus are kept in the shadow, the word works in the heart of those who have heard it:

"Among those who heard the word, many became believers;
their number was about five thousand persons". (4:4)

The confidence of the apostles provoked the astonishment of the Sanhedrin members and left them bewildered. On the one hand, they saw men whom they put in the category of people "without education or culture", who have not received any training, and yet dare to speak openly, and on the other hand, they observed the surprising effects of their word.

This contrast between the human “incompetence” of the speakers and the success of their preaching is a sign of the energy of the word itself.

This opposition is reinforced by the paradox of the situation: the members of the Great Council, men of religious tradition and culture, are incapable of finding the arguments to reply to the speeches of the apostles; they rest speechless: “they had nothing to say in reply” (4:14). We find again here the gap we underlined between the speech, “the doctrine” and the word. “The speech articulates and argues” the message, and it is truly at this level that the Sanhedrin members are situated, which is why they have no reply to give the apostles, while for the latter, the word goes beyond speech and when understood it arouses an interest, “it awakens either a desire for listening or for hatred”, in those who receive it or in those who refuse it.⁸⁸ The success of the word therefore does not come from a purely human competence or wisdom, but from the energy of the word itself. We rejoin here what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“My word and my message had nothing of the persuasive speeches of wisdom; rather it was a demonstration of Spirit and of power so that your faith might rest, not on human wisdom, but on the power of God”.

(1 Cor 2:4-5)

The threats and the prohibitions of the Sanhedrin members, far from upsetting the mission of the apostles and reducing the energy of the word, contribute on the contrary to the expansion of the new faith.

Through the journeys, from Judea to Samaria, from Antioch to Ephesus, whether the missionaries of the Gospel are speaking to Jews or to pagans, one sentence punctuates their movement: “The word of God continued to spread and to grow”. (Acts 6:7; 12:24) Thus, by the energy of the Lord, “the word grew and gained in strength” (19:20). However we should not interpret this expression in the sense of an expansion, of a numerical growth, even if the text of Acts willingly records some impressive numbers, it is rather in the sense of recognizing the work of the word who acts in the heart of human beings. The word is itself power of Salvation and of life.

-the pathway of the Word

Without spending time on the geographical journey of the apostolic preaching, from its birth in Jerusalem, then its passage through Judea and Samaria, as far as the ends of the earth (1:8), let us try to see how the word is at work in the human world.

If the ministry of the Word knew difficulties in the time of the prophets, as it did in the mission of Jesus himself, the missionaries of the early Church will encounter, in their turn, welcome or refusal, acceptance or incomprehension. Committed in a plan which goes beyond them and on a route which they have not always chosen, grappling with circumstances and unforeseen events, the apostles will face up to very diverse audiences to which they must proclaim the message of Salvation. Sometimes they come up against Jews who, in their fidelity to the Law and the traditions of the Fathers, cannot accept their message, sometimes they discover the action of the word which, unbeknown to them, is making its own way in the heart of those who listen.

⁸⁸ Cf L. Panier in *Light and Life Doors open to faith Mission in the Acts of the Apostles* p. 114-115

The meeting of Peter and the centurion Cornelius is a good illustration of the pathway of the word. This episode which marks a decisive stage in the apostolic mission will play a decisive role in the opening of the community of believers to non-Jews and to pagans. Cornelius, “a good man, who worships God” (10:22) is open to the word: “All of us are here before you to listen to everything that the Lord has told you to tell us” (10:33). Peter then explains the essence of the message of Salvation: God sent to the people of Israel the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all men and women” (10:36). This message is fulfilled in the event of the death and the resurrection of Christ. “Peter was still explaining all these events when the Holy Spirit came down upon all those who were listening to the word”. (10:44)

All through the Acts, numerous episodes could illustrate this pathway of the word which at times encounters welcome and listening, at other times refusal and incomprehension, struggle and division. In the fourth chapter, after the liberation of Peter and John, the apostles and the community of believers reread the recent events in the light of the Scripture. The words of the psalmist take on a new meaning in the “today” of the situation to which they have to face up: the collusion between the religious and political authorities: “Herod and Pilate, together with the pagan nations and the people of Israel”, against Christ Jesus. So they do not ask God for the grace to be freed from this situation of crisis and opposition, but for the strength to proclaim the word with confidence. (Acts 4:27-29; Ps. 2) The Scriptures continue to be fulfilled at the heart of the mission. The missionary preaching is the very word of God which acts and spreads.

In the forces united against the preaching of the word of God, the missionaries and the community of believers sometimes see the instruments of God’s plan. The word opens for itself new paths: “Paul and Barnabas were bold enough to declare to the Jews, it was to you that we had to speak the word of God first; since you refuse it, we are now going to turn to the pagans” (13:48). “And the pagans filled with joy praised the Lord’s message.... And the word spread through all the region.” (13: 48-49)

Apparent failures or defeats of the missionary preaching are not failures of the word. The evangelical word continues on its way, leaving its mark in the hearts of those who receive it.

C. SENT UNDER THE IMPULSE OF THE SPIRIT

If the apostolic preaching, in its first examples, is proclamation of Salvation in the name of Jesus Christ and service of the word, this proclamation cannot be done without the gift of the Spirit. We need now to examine how the Spirit intervenes and acts in the mission of the first “witnesses of the Resurrection”. Witnesses “chosen under the action of the Spirit”, filled with its energy, the apostles, committed in a plan which goes beyond them, are led in their journeying by this mysterious energy which lives in them and will make them capable of proclaiming the word with confidence and of discovering it at work in the human world.

1. WITNESSES CHOSEN UNDER THE ACTION OF THE SPIRIT

-Chosen, “set apart”

From the beginning of their mission, the apostles were the object of a personal choice on the part of Christ Jesus, after a night spent on the mountain in prayer to God, he called them by their name. (Luke 6:12-14) In the prologue of Acts, Luke specifies that Christ “chose them under the action of the Spirit”. (Acts 1:2)

Before leaving the Eleven and being “lifted up”, Jesus entrusts them with his last instructions and gives them the order to wait for “the promise of the Father”: “Stay in Jerusalem.... Wait... you will receive an energy” (Acts 1:4,5,8). Opening their minds to understand, in the light of the Scriptures, the mystery of his Pasch, he reveals to them the universal extent of their mission:

“It is as it was written: the Christ will suffer and be raised from the dead, the third day, and in his name the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem. It is you who are the witnesses of this. And I myself will send upon you what my Father has promised.”

(Luke 24:46-49)

The apostles are therefore invited to live in the expectation of a promise whose object is not specified, but that the prologue of Acts, closely connected with the first book of Luke, explains in terms of gift and of baptism: “John, on his part, baptised with water, but you, it is in the Holy Spirit that you will be baptised in a few days.” (Acts 1:5)

The Spirit is promised to them as an energy to undertake their mission as witnesses (1:8). Indeed, the mission does not come from a human initiative; they received it from Christ risen, and the Spirit is the true initiator of their sending on mission. Even before the pouring out of the Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, the designation of Matthias to replace Judas, one of the twelve that Jesus had chosen, shows the action of the Spirit who takes hold of Peter and makes him understand, in the light of the Scriptures, the itinerary of the one who “went as he was destined”: “he was a member of our group and had been chosen to have a part in our service.” (1:17) Therefore “someone else must take his place” and be chosen from among those who were together around the Lord Jesus, “so that he may join us as witnesses of his resurrection”. (1:22)

The call to mission, under the action of the Spirit, remains a reality lived in the heart of the first communities. The Spirit intervenes in decisive moments, when it is question of the entry on the scene of new missionaries of the word: Stephen “filled with faith and the Holy Spirit” (6:5,10), Barnabas and Saul at Antioch. While a group of “prophets and men responsible for teaching were celebrating the worship of the Lord and fasting, the Spirit told them: “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul to do the work to which I have called them.” (13:1-2)

Conscious of having been chosen and called by Christ, under the action of the Spirit, filled with the energy of the Spirit, the apostles will take up their mission of servants of the word and of witnesses of the resurrection.

-Filled with the Holy Spirit

As Jesus, at the beginning of his mission, is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1) the apostles also, before undertaking their mission as witnesses, receive the Holy Spirit; the promise of the Father is fulfilled, the Spirit is given to them in view of preaching and of bearing witness.

Before the leaders of the people, the elders and the scribes, Peter “filled with the Holy Spirit”, speaks up (4:8) It is the Spirit who inspires his witness and strengthens his profession of faith. The witness of the apostles does not come from themselves: the word of Christ risen is rooted in the heart of the apostles and, under the action of the Spirit, takes hold of them. They announce it publicly with all the energy of their faith.

As G. Lafont remarks, “we have often noted that the apostles did not present themselves as eye witnesses of the resurrection: they attest it, also the lifting up, the glorification of Jesus, the pouring out of the Spirit; nothing of all that belongs to the visible order”.⁸⁹ However it is not question of a “purely invisible”, since they affirm “having eaten and drunk with him, after his resurrection from the dead” (Acts 10:41). By affirming that they have seen the Christ living, they commit themselves totally in their witness and “it is by the Spirit, sent by the Risen one, that the apostles announce the resurrection, and it is the Spirit who, by its interior work, confirms this proclamation”.⁹⁰ Under its impulse, they proclaim that Christ is alive, he lives with God.

The Spirit is not only given to the apostles and disciples of Jesus. The community which asked for the energy to “proclaim the word with confidence” (4:29) receives the outpouring of the Spirit. As on the day of Pentecost, “the place where they were gathered shook”, all were then “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:31). All receive, by the Spirit, the gift of the word. The Spirit causes them to speak: “They began to proclaim the word of God with confidence” (4:31). They become “speakers” and henceforth nothing can prevent them from energetically stating the certainty which lives in them: Christ Jesus is risen, he is alive. What now becomes the norm for the missionaries, is not that they proclaim their message without any obstacles, but rather that they accept the challenge of counting with opponents, in order that the word continue to be proclaimed boldly.

2. THE JOURNEYING OF THE WITNESSES

The Spirit enters the missionaries of the word and pushes them to go out, to pass through the barriers of their social class, of their religious traditions, to open towards wider horizons. Sent and led by the Spirit, they set out on the roadways of the world, towards the encounter with the other.

-Sent....towards the encounter with the other

Jesus “filled with the Holy Spirit” is led to the desert by the Spirit (Luke 4:1) and acts in the Spirit all through his mission as Sent from the Father. The apostles also are sent to fulfill their mission of witnesses in the energy of the Spirit. Immediately after Pentecost, the breath of the Spirit animates them with a new impulse. Peter and John go to the Temple and there inaugurate their first preaching before the people who run to them, after the healing of the cripple. Freed from prison, they receive a new order sending them on mission: “The angel of the Lord, after leading them outside, told them: Go and proclaim firmly in the Temple all about this Life” (6:20). The angel of the Lord is there not to give

⁸⁹ G. Lafont, op. cit. p.148

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.149told them

information, but to indicate the transmission of the Word of life. The Word must keep on going its way.

The Spirit sends on mission those it chooses and stirs them to leave their universe, in order to start walking, to meet the other. Philip hears the call: "Leave here, go at the hour of noon on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert road." (8:26) There he meets a stranger looking for someone to explain to him the word of God. "The energy of the Spirit is living in the text, waiting for an interpreter aroused by it."⁹¹ After explaining to the eunuch the text of Isaiah and having baptised him, Philip is "taken up" by the Spirit of the Lord and "he continued on his way, full of joy, proclaiming the good news in all the towns he passed through." (8:39-40)

The encounter of Peter and the centurion Cornelius illustrates in a striking way the Spirit's intervention. Peter, still lost in his vision, hears the call of the Spirit telling him he must welcome the men sent to find him in Joppa: "Here are two men looking for you. Go down immediately, and take the road with them, without any hesitation, because I have sent them." (10:20) Now these messengers inform him that Cornelius also, "has received from a holy angel" the order to fetch Peter to his home in order to hear the words that he has to tell him (10:23). The pathways of Peter and Cornelius cross, the pagan world will meet, in the freedom of the Spirit, the founding nucleus of the first Christian community. During the apostle's catechesis, "the Spirit came down on all those who had listened to the Word" and they can only conclude that "now the gift of the Spirit is poured out even on the pagan nations". (10:44-45)

In the journeying mission of Paul "sent to bring the Name before the pagan nations" (9:15), the Spirit can "let loose its art of journeys", according to the expression of E. Haulotte.⁹² Here it is not a question of following the many journeys of Paul and of his companions; what seems to us essential to underline is the action of the Spirit which, through encounters and relationships linked according to circumstances, opens new horizons to the missionaries. The Spirit sends, the Spirit guides.

-Guided by the Spirit

Sent in the energy of the Spirit, the disciples of Jesus are led and guided on roads they have not chosen, in situations which surprise or confuse them. Where the Spirit is acting, the unexpected and the unforeseen play a decisive role.

From the beginning of their mission, Peter and John experienced arrest and appearance before the Great Council; these events, far from being obstacles which stopped their missionary impetus, on the contrary pushed them forward. The Spirit roused in them an energy which allowed them to stand up to the religious authorities, without any fear, and to energetically proclaim the good news of Salvation in Christ risen.

If the Spirit traces the route and guides the missionaries, its action is all the same not magical. Through the events and their daily experience, they have to discern the action of the Spirit at work in the heart of the life of human beings. The Spirit does not explain to

⁹¹ C. Duquoc, *Initiation to the Practice of Theology, Dogmatics 1* p.58

⁹² E. Haulotte, *Acts of the Apostles A Reading guide*. Christian Life supplement No.212, 1977, p.91

Peter the meaning of the vision, nor how to behave in the presence of Cornelius; he has to decipher the movements of the Spirit and the work of the Word.

Sometimes the Spirit even opposes the missionaries' plans. "Paul and Silas travelled through Phrygia and the Galatian region, because the Holy Spirit did not let them preach the Word in the province of Asia. When they reached the borders of Mysia they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them." (16:6-7) During a vision, Paul hears the appeal of a stranger, "a Macedonian". This appeal "breaks in and invites to cross over": "Come over to Macedonia and help us". (16:9) A new field of apostolic work opens before him. "In this cry, Paul and Silas hear the Word of God".⁹³ This mysterious episode shows clearly that "the apostolic journey does not obey a missionary strategy of propaganda and expansion, starting from a centre of reference."⁹⁴ The Spirit leads and the Spirit commits the one sent on an unforeseen route where spontaneously perhaps he or she would not want to commit themselves. And it is undoubtedly the unforeseeable character of the path traced mysteriously by the Spirit and the effects of this wandering which define the missionary, rather than the message they transmit.

Paul is tied up, "chained" to his mission of proclaiming the Word. In his address to the Elders of Ephesus, he sees ahead the trials and sufferings which await him, but he does not want to free himself. In his eyes, what counts is the fulfilment of his apostolic task, whatever the cost. He wants to accomplish it right to the end, with the unshakeable certainty that he can count on the energy of the Spirit:

"Now here I am chained up by the Spirit, on my way to Jerusalem, without knowing what awaits me there, except that in every town the Holy Spirit warns me that chains and sufferings await me. But I reckon my own life to be worth nothing to me, provided that I complete my mission and finish the work that the Lord Jesus gave me to do: to declare the Good News about the grace of God." (20:22-24)

3. WITNESSES LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

Witnesses chosen under the action of the Spirit, sent and guided by the Spirit, the missionaries speak in the Name of Jesus and proclaim "the Gospel of the grace of God". Their mission as witnesses does not consist in transmitting a message which would be the simple statement of observed facts or of events which surrounded the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. At the service of the Word, they are called to allow themselves to be transformed by it and to be attentive to the presence and the action of the Spirit in themselves and in others, in welcome and listening.

-Listening for the Spirit

The witnesses of Christ Jesus do not speak from themselves; they see themselves as servants of a Word which is at the foundation of their bearing witness. On Pentecost day, they are witnesses of a speaking event: "All were then filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak." (2:4) The Spirit is not speech, it is not word, it makes speak. It is also capacity to listen and to welcome. Before one is able to say the word, one must listen to it. Therefore, to take up their mission of

⁹³ F. Martin, *Semiotics and the Bible* No.59 Sept. 1990, p.15

⁹⁴ L. Panier, *Light and Life* No. 205, p.116

“speakers”, the apostles must first listen to the Spirit who is at work in the world of human beings.

From the beginning of his public preaching, Peter “standing up with the Eleven”, echoing the cry of the prophets: “Listen”, or the first word that every pious Israelite recites every day: “Listen Israel...” (Deut. 6:4), speaks to the people with authority: “Men of Judea and all of you staying in Jerusalem, hear this, listen to my words” (2:14).⁹⁵ What Peter announces is that the gift of the Spirit announced by the prophet Joel has now been fulfilled: “I will pour out my Spirit on everyone, your sons and daughters will be prophets... Yes, on my servants and handmaids, in those days, I will pour out my Spirit.” (Acts 2:17-18) So it is now that the pouring out of the Spirit is fulfilled. The Spirit is not manifested for its own sake, but in order to make known what has happened to Jesus: “God has raised up this Jesus, we are all witnesses of this, and now lifted up by God’s right hand, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and has poured it out; this is what you see and hear.” (2:32-33) The Spirit brings to their fulfilment the promises of the Old Testament and takes hold of this new people to give it life.

Listening to the Spirit, the apostles, little by little, will decipher the meaning of the events which take place before their eyes and make the connection with the Word of God what is being lived out in the community of believers and among the pagans. (4:25-26) Before the hostile forces that confront them, in the “today” of their mission, the apostles and the community of believers discover under a new light the psalm attributed to David. The messianic significance of this text inspired by the Spirit takes on a new meaning in their eyes. The collusion “between nations and peoples, kings and magistrates against the Lord and his Anointed” (Ps.2:1-2) is now fulfilled. The Anointed of the Lord is Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy Servant of God, against whom the pagan nations and the people of Israel, Herod and Pilate have joined together to kill. But he is alive, risen. They understand that the “hand of God” has guided the events that God, in God’s wisdom, had determined beforehand (4:28) thus confirming Jesus in his messianic prerogatives. He is Lord and Christ. “Witnesses of the resurrection”, far from wanting to escape the threats of their adversaries, they want only one thing: the energy to continue to proclaim the Word with confidence (4:29).

The missionary preaching is rooted in the Word of God, but it needs witnesses to listen and to tell it. The formula of Paul, in the letter to the Romans: “Faith comes from preaching and preaching is the proclamation of the Word of Christ”, clearly illustrates what we are saying; translated literally, it puts the emphasis on the primacy of listening, indispensable not only for the missionary, but for every person: “faith is born of listening, listening through the word of Christ. (Rom. 10:17) The word that the apostles have heard, speaks through their mouth with an energy such that they say they are powerless to silence it: “we cannot not speak” (4:20). Such is their mission of witnesses listening to the Spirit.

-The gift of the Spirit, power of transformation

The Spirit does not only accompany this Church coming to birth in the way it goes, it is from the interior that it constructs it, builds it up. The insertion of the Word in the heart of the

⁹⁵ The verb used in the Septuagint does not belong to classical Greek. It means literally: “put in the ear”.

apostles and of all those who listen to their message, this is the work of the Spirit: the Word liberated by the Spirit becomes then energy of transformation and source of communion. That is why the missionaries become, by listening to the Spirit, the revealers of what is already in the others. Their mission has for object to discover the presence and the action of the Spirit in the heart of those who listen to the Word and transmit it, and of those who resist it. In their apostolic task, nothing is decided beforehand; the Spirit makes light of plans and strategies; it is master of the unforeseen, “the unknown beyond the Word”, according to the expression of Urs von Balthasar.⁹⁶

In hearing the speech of Peter, affirming his faith: “Let the whole house of Israel know with certainty: God has made this Jesus that you, you have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (2:36), his hearers “were pierced to the heart”. To their question: “What must we do?” Peter replies by an appeal to conversion: “Turn away from your sins, and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will then receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (2:38) In his speech to the people, after the healing of the cripple, Peter repeats his appeal to a radical change of life: Turn around and come back, transform your way of seeing and of judging, to enter into a new life, that which the Lord will give through the Christ. (3:19-20)

The encounter of Peter and Cornelius is an exemplary case of this action of the Spirit who disposes the heart to hear the Word. In an attitude of perfect availability and of listening, Cornelius and all those around him are ready to welcome this word which is not that of a man: “Now, here we all are in front of you to listen to all that the Lord has laid on you to tell us.” (10:33). Peter is going to realise that the Spirit has preceded him and that the Word is already at work in the heart of this “good man” to whom the angel had said: “He will tell you words which will bring salvation to you and all your family”. (11:14) When Peter reports to the Jerusalem brothers the experience he had in Cornelius’ house, they are worried, but Peter reassures them, he can only see for himself the intervention of the Spirit who has freed the Word in the heart of these pagans, the Word which transforms. Thanks to these pagans, the Jerusalem brothers “themselves have a conversion in the Spirit”⁹⁷ and glorify God in saying: “So then, to the pagans also God has given the repentance that leads to life.” (11:18) Salvation in Jesus Christ is for all human beings, so it must be proclaimed to all.

-The Spirit, source of communion

In our reading of Acts 4:1-31, we perceived the action of the Spirit as the interior dynamism which gives the Word its power of life and of renewal. “The language of the Spirit brings into communion, it does not close one in oneself.”⁹⁸ If the mission of the witnesses of Christ risen, under the impulse of the Spirit, consists essentially in making the Word get to the heart of human beings and transform the life of those who are listening, it is to make them come into communion with God. The Spirit is the living link of the communion of the Father and the Son, it maintains and attests to the open relationship between the Father and the Son, as we have seen in Hilary of Poitiers whose theological reflection is especially based on the Johannine writings and on the teaching of Paul. God reveals Godself in the Son Jesus, as God is in Godself, in a communion of existence which is unique relationship of the Father

⁹⁶ Quoted by Y. Congar. Introduction to the Practice of Theology Dogmatics 1 , p.489

⁹⁷ E. Haulotte, op. cit. p.91

⁹⁸ C. Duquoc, Different God, op.cit. p.109

and the Son in the gratuity of gift. The believer is called to enter, already in this life, into this movement of exchange, and it is the Spirit who conforms to this filial attitude and opens the believer to communion with God. The Spirit is the artisan of this communion with God and in the human community. An attentive reading of the book of Acts allows us to discover that the experience of the Spirit, in the Church-coming-to-birth, is lived in the concrete reality of the relationships formed with others.

The community which forms around the first disciples of Christ Jesus, under the action of the Spirit, knows itself in living relationship with God and with the brothers and sisters. Although we did not include verses 32 to 35 in our study of the fourth chapter of Acts, it seems to us important to underline this action of the Spirit which opens to communion: "The multitude of those who had become believers had but one heart and one soul" (4:32). A brief summary describes, further on, the period of tranquillity that the Church was going through and attributes it to the support of the Spirit: "The Church, throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria, was living in peace, it strengthened and grew in numbers with the help of the Holy Spirit, as it lived in reverence for the Lord." (9:31)

The Spirit is source of communion and not abolition of differences in the human world. These become, under the movement of the Spirit, source of richness and foundation of communication. The Spirit is power of transformation, and it is through tensions and conflicts, oppositions and persecutions that it fashions the ecclesial community and makes it capable of witnessing to its faith in a unanimity drawn at the well-spring of God Trinity.

CONCLUSION

In the last section of this presentation, it is necessary to take up again the initial question and to look again at the road that has been covered, in order to pick out the principal markers that have cleared our route. Our project, starting from the fundamental intuition of the foundress of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions, was not to build a theological address on an abstract theoretical base, but to discern what is vital for the proclamation of the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ, at the heart of the mystery of the human being, whoever they may be and whatever may be their background. As well as the interest we had in discovering the work of Hilary of Poitiers, the fundamental ideas obtained by the study centred on the three themes of the **Name**, of **Sonship** and of **Sending**, in guiding our reading of the Acts of the Apostles, have opened for us unsuspected perspectives on mission. The convergence of these main lines of thought will allow us to clearly specify what is essentially at stake for us in mission today, in our human world.

1. THE NAME, SACRAMENT OF SALVATION

In a brief reminder, let us underline the aspects and functions of the name, as we presented them from an anthropological point of view. The name serves to designate a person, it appears as the guarantee of the recognition of the being, of the unique character of each individual. The name identifies the person and represents the permanence of this identity. To give a name, is to make the person exist; the name adheres to the being. A human being lives only as named. To name is to call, it is to make someone enter into a conversation, in a relationship of dialogue. The truth of the human being comes from his being named by another. The one who has a name becomes a being of language, a “speaking” subject who can enter into relationship with others.

We have asked the question of the naming of God. Is this possible? In our “search for a synthesis”, at the end of our reading of Hilary of Poitiers,⁹⁹ we have already underlined the importance of this question of the Name which led us to discover, in the Old Testament tradition, that the Name of YHWH, at the same time revealed and hidden, means the very mystery of God. God names Godself “The one who IS”, it is the name proper to God which corresponds to God’s intimate being and becomes the sign of God’s presence among human beings. In giving his Name, God gives Godself and installs a relationship of person to person with the human being. God is the one who “is with” and reveals Godself as the one who saves. (Exodus 3:14-15)

If the name of YHWH appears in this perspective as the sacrament, the sign of the presence of God invisible, the passage to the new faith in Jesus Christ happens also around the Name, a Name which carries the very reality of the being of Christ Jesus. The Name of Christ Jesus gives access to his person, and it is the presence of Jesus, his unique individuality which, from now on, constitutes the mystery and the sacrament of the presence of God among men and women.

-What is at stake for mission?

⁹⁹ Cf above p.46

A crucial question for mission confronts us: What can a name mean for the women and men of today? What is the object of their search for meaning? Can they discover it in a name?

The question and the need of Salvation constitute a fundamental anthropological datum. All human beings refer to names to be saved: names of heroes, of particular people, names of values.....; they want to name their gods, their reasons to hope in a fullness of life. If the idea of a God who saves is common to all religions, it shows itself in a primordial way in the faith of Israel: the Salvation of humankind is God and God alone, and the Name of YHWH is source of Salvation. The first speeches of Acts proclaim that Salvation is Jesus himself. When Peter declares: "There is no other Name under heaven given to humans through which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), there is a close identification of the Name with the person that it represents. This name cannot be separated from one unique man: Jesus of Nazareth. We can borrow the formula of the encyclical Redemptoris Missio affirming the reality of the Reign "which is not a concept, a doctrine, a programme that one can freely elaborate, but it is above all a **Person** who has the face and the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, image of the invisible God." (R.M. No. 18)

Human beings are to recognize themselves around a Name, "**a Name which is above every Name**" (Phil. 2:9). If Jesus risen is "Saviour", it is because he is the first of the "saved". Son of God from all eternity, true God and true man, he has totally taken on the human condition. Because of his double solidarity with God and with humanity, Christ Jesus has lived in his flesh the event of Salvation. Through a double movement of humbling himself, he takes on to the fullest extent the human condition – the condition of servant or of slave -, obedient to death and the death of a slave, on the cross. On the one "who no longer looked like a man" (Isaiah 52:14), God writes God's Name. The Name which is above every name, is the Name of Jesus, the most simple Name; there is no question of prestigious titles: King, Messiah...., but of the Name which is the closest to what cannot be expressed, to say oneself: one's unique personality. The Name of Jesus is enough to reveal the mystery of Salvation. God recognizes him as Lord and Saviour, like Godself and with God.

This name becomes the heart of the kerygma, the one that the missionaries must proclaim. "To invoke the Name", "bear the Name", "teach the Name", is to recognize that Salvation is at work in Jesus, through faith in his Name.

2. THE MYSTERY OF SONSHIP AND THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

The Name reveals the filial identity constitutive of the person of Christ Jesus. He is Son. The naming of Jesus as Son is attributed to God. In the mystery of the divine sonship, the Father transmits to the Son all that he is : "God has made him Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36), "Lifted up by the right hand of God" (2:33). Revealed as Son of God in glory, Christ Jesus receives in his humanity, the gifts of the divine Lordship, as he shares with the Father the divine condition.

The object of the faith is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, it is to recognize that his Name reveals his filial identity. In showing himself as the Son, Jesus reveals that Father is the name which most deeply expresses the being of God. Son of the living God, he is the

only one who knows the Father. According to the expression of Hilary of Poitiers: "God is known as Father only by the Son, "revelation in the image".

The mystery of the divine sonship uncovers the deep meaning of the human being created in the image of God. Because Jesus is the Son of God, as a man he reveals in the human being his "filial structure". It is because they are sons (and daughters) of man that human beings are called to become sons (and daughters) of God, to reproduce in themselves the image of the Son. The incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ, true God and true man, "attests that there is no other place to be human, no other life in order to be saved."¹⁰⁰ The filial humanity of Jesus, incarnation of the Word, is the way of Salvation for human beings.

In the Son, God names Godself with a name of language: the Word: God speaks. In Jesus Christ God gives God's Word to human beings, but the welcome of this Word presupposes, from the human being's side, an attitude of faith in the word of another; for the Word of God is human word, it only reaches human beings through the "medium" of other human beings, and it speaks only if it reaches man or woman in their concrete fleshly existence.

The apostles, entrusted with a mission by the risen Christ, are grasped by the energy of the Word which lives in them. They do not announce events, they have a message to carry from God's part, they are witnesses of a word event. They bear witness that the Word of God has been announced to them and they proclaim it.

-Witnesses at the service of the Word

Witnesses of the risen Christ, the apostles received an order of mission: "He told us to proclaim to the people and to bear this witness..." (Acts 10:42) To be at the service of the Word does not only mean to transmit a message, to communicate a teaching; the Word is a dynamic reality which arouses in the apostles the energy to speak, to proclaim "what they have seen and heard". "To be messenger", "to speak in the name of..." does not mean that the apostles take the relay of Jesus and continue his prophetic mission, it is the Word which takes hold of them, which speaks in them with such an energy that they declare they are powerless to keep it quiet (4:20). They bear witness that the word has been addressed to them and they proclaim it with confidence, without fear of obstacles and oppositions, even to risking their life.

If the ministry of the apostles is essentially a service of the Word which is itself source of Salvation, they are called to bring to light this hidden source and to follow its pathway in the human world. It is in the "today" of their mission, through the concrete reality of the life of men and women, that the witnesses discover the power of the Name and the effects of the Word of God which is at work under their eyes. Witnesses of the effects of the Word among human beings, "the success" of their ministry does not come from their competence or from a quite human wisdom, but the energy of the Word itself which makes its own way in the heart of those who listen to it. The task of the missionaries sometimes consists in setting free the Word which was covered up, so that it might burst into the life of those that they

¹⁰⁰ Cf L.Panier, op cit, p.366

meet, in order for them to recognize the mysterious presence of Christ risen. Event of encounter and event of language, lived in the community which makes them say the Word and share it with others, the ministry of the Word is energy of transformation in the response of human freedoms. Every human being is invited to discover in themselves, the space opened by the Word of God and to become in their turn “speaking”, so that the Word may continue to go on its way.

3. WITNESSES SENT IN THE ENERGY OF THE SPIRIT

The gift of the Spirit completes the trinitarian revelation and makes of Salvation a trinitarian act. The Spirit is promised to the apostles as an energy for them to undertake their mission as witnesses, for the mission does not come from a human initiative, they received it from Christ risen, and the Spirit is the true initiator of their sending on mission .

Chosen and called by Christ under the action of the Spirit, the apostles, filled with the energy of the Spirit, take on their mission of servants of the Word and witnesses of the resurrection. Their witness does not come from themselves: the word of Christ risen *is rooted in their heart and, under the action of the Spirit, they are capable of proclaiming it publicly with all the energy of their faith.

The connection between the gift of the Spirit and the Word is abundantly clear. The Spirit is not given only to the apostles and disciples of Jesus, the community of believers also receives the pouring out of the Spirit, all receive the gift of the Word. Under its impulse, they become “speakers” that henceforth nothing can prevent from proclaiming their faith in Christ risen.

The Spirit sends on mission those whom it chooses and drives them to leave their own world in order to take to the road, to encounter the other. We indicated several examples: Philip on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, Peter at the home of the centurion Cornelius.... Through encounters and relationships created according to circumstances, the Spirit opens up for the missionaries new places for evangelisation and invites the Church to open its doors, to go beyond the ethnic and religious barriers, without the limits of space or time, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Before being able to speak the Word, we must listen to it. Hence ,to take up their mission of “speakers”, the missionaries must first set themselves to listen to the Spirit who is at work in their life and in human history, to discern the meaning of the events occurring under their eyes and to connect these to the Word of God.

-The Spirit, source of communion

We have seen in the treatise of Hilary of Poitiers how the mission of Jesus, the One Sent from the Father, bears witness to his intimate union with the Father, but that the unity of Father and Son is not a face-to-face, a mutual contemplation closed on itself. The communion between the Father and the Son opens onto a third “Person”, the Spirit.

The Spirit is revelation of the communion in God Trinity. The sending of the Spirit, gift of the Father and the Son reveals this mystery of communion. Sent from the Father by the Son, the Spirit is conferred as gift to men and women to open their mind to the mystery of God, to make of them sons and daughters of God, in the image of the Son, and to uncover the intimate mystery of God who is communion.

In our reading of the Acts, we perceived the action of the Spirit as energy of transformation and source of communion. The Spirit sends and guides the apostles in their itinerant mission, but it is especially from the interior that it builds the newborn Church. If the mission of the witnesses of the risen Christ, under the impulse of the Spirit, essentially consists in making the Word get to the heart of human beings and transform their life, it is to make them enter into communion with God. "The Spirit installs communication and opens to communion"; it is the opening of the divine communion to what is not divine, it is the Spirit who brings into the filial relationship of the Son to his Father, according to the words of C. Duquoc: "The Spirit who is the memory of Jesus conforms the believer to this filial relationship".¹⁰¹

The mystery of the human being is only made clear in the mystery of the Son, Word incarnate, who communicates himself to men and women in order to reveal to them the depth of the mystery of God Trinity. The Spirit, breath of the Father and the Son, makes present and real in many different ways the unique plan of the Father who invites human beings to enter into the mystery of God's life of communion. This life of communion with God, lived in the concrete reality of relationships with others, in the respect of differences, of richness and of limitation, at the heart of the human family is the work of the Spirit who is source of communion.

Starting from the fundamental intuition of Euphrasie Barbier who wanted to go beyond the "everyday" meaning of mission, often defined, in her day, as the sending of missionaries to foreign lands, to work out a theology of mission rooted in the Mission of the incarnate Word and the Mission of the Spirit, such has been the goal of our work.

At the end of this road, it seems to us that this theological approach which situates mission at the very source of the mystery of God Trinity and of the Missions which come forth for the Salvation of every human being created in the image of God, gives a foundation to what we call concretely Mission in the Church.

In a (very modest) congregation implanted in countries with very diverse cultures and religious traditions, in very different socio-economic and political backgrounds, which demand of missionaries knowledge of the anthropological context and an effort of inculturation so that the good news of Salvation in Jesus Christ may be proclaimed and heard, this rooting of sending in the dynamism of the Mission of the Son of God, Word made flesh, and of the Mission of the Spirit, expresses the very nature of the Church which in its entirety is sent in the footsteps of the apostles. As the Decree on the missionary

¹⁰¹ C, Duquoc Different God, op.cit p.109- 111

activity of the Church declares: “Of its nature, the Church, during its pilgrimage on earth, is missionary, since she takes her origin from the Mission of the Son and the Mission of the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of God the Father.” (Ad Gentes 2)

Every human being is called to discover, under the action of the Spirit, that the name of Father most deeply expresses the being of God and that the Name of Jesus is source of life for all those who believe in him. If the ministry of the Name and the service of the Word are incumbent on the missionaries sent as witnesses to communicate the good news of Salvation, this dynamism can also take hold of every human being called today, as in former days, to enter into a life of communion in the life of God Father, Son and Spirit. God the Living One whose Name we invoke, whose Word we listen to, whose face we discover in the One who has taken flesh of our flesh, opens to us communion and calls all human beings to enter into this movement of life. We are sent, under the impulse of the Spirit, in the humility of daily tasks, in the encounters with our brothers and sisters in humanity, to bear witness that God is Love.