A popular image of the Church, found explicitly in over half of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, views the Church as a “pilgrim.” She is “the pilgrim People of God” (LG 68); she is on an “earthly pilgrimage” (AA 4). This “pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature” (AG 2); “as she makes her pilgrim way” (UR 2), she is constantly “led by the Holy Spirit” (GS 1).

The Church, “like a pilgrim in a foreign land” (LG 8), needs direction and guidance to fulfill her mission, to keep hope and enthusiasm alive, to reach the fullness of the Kingdom. New challenges are constantly emerging as she struggles with her mission of evangelization in the contemporary world. Although a pilgrim, she is never an orphan (Jn 14:18); she has been promised an Advocate to be with her forever (Jn 14:16).

Precisely because of her nature as God’s Pilgrim People (in via), the Church needs the active presence of the person of the Holy Spirit. Without constant guidance from the Spirit, she could never fulfill her task of “scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel” (GS 4). Yet, the Spirit does not provide ready-made, detailed architectural blueprints for the Church and her mission. The Spirit’s presence provides “signposts” for the Church, “as she goes her pilgrim way” (UR 9).

Signposts provide direction and guidance. Pilgrims advance in their journey and mission only if they constantly follow the road indicated by these signposts. Under the intimate and personal lead of the befriending Spirit (GS 3), Christians effectively engage in mission as they observe Spirit-given signposts.
The goal of this brief essay is to present several important “Signposts of the Spirit” for the Church for understanding her mission and concretely implementing it in contemporary times.

ECCLESIAL RENEWAL

The greatest “signpost of the Spirit” in recent times has been the event of Vatican II (1962-1965). The Council was conceived by Pope John XXIII as a “new Pentecost” (Pentecost, 1959); he noted that “it is in the light of the teaching and the spirit of Pentecost that the great event of the ecumenical council takes on life and substance” (Pentecost, 1960). John XXIII composed and promoted a special Prayer to the Holy Spirit for the Success of the Ecumenical Council.

The bishops assembled for the Council appreciated Vatican II itself as a unique manifestation of the Spirit: “this most sacred Synod . . . has been gathered in the Holy Spirit” (LG 1); the Council brings to humanity light kindled . . . “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (GS 3).

Twenty years later during the Synod of Bishops in 1985, the Council was termed “a wellspring offered by the Holy Spirit to the church, for the present and the future.” The synod gave thanks “for the greatest grace of this century, that is, the Second Vatican Council.” The synod celebrated the Council “as a grace of God, and a gift of the Holy Spirit, from which have come forth many spiritual fruits for the universal church and the particular churches. . . .” The large majority of the faithful received the Council “with heartfelt adherence, because the Holy Spirit was prompting his church to do so.”

More recently, John Paul II asserted that “the teaching of this Council is essentially ‘pneumatological’; it is permeated by the truth about the Holy Spirit, as the soul of the Church” (DeV 26). A close examination of the Council reveals that there are 258 references to the Holy Spirit scattered among the 16 documents. The Vatican II era (our era) is a privileged moment of the Spirit. The renewal (aggiornamento) of the Church, her mission, theology, spirituality, and praxis have all been the work of the Spirit.

An adequate and practical response to this great “signpost” is to further study and deeply imbibe the vision of the Council
so as to promote it in the church in such a way that it might be fully received and lived. This goal has not been completely accomplished; it remains a fundamental task of all evangelizers. Vatican II itself is a trustworthy compass for missionary renewal in the pilgrim church.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

A second “signpost” which complements the ecclesial renewal wrought by Vatican II is personal conversion and transformation in the Spirit. The Spirit is not some abstract or distant being; the Spirit is to be known intimately as a personal presence, as Person-love, as Person-gift (DeV 10, 22, 50). The nature of the Spirit is to be a personal companion to the missioner, giving the grace of a mission vocation, enabling one to discerningly fulfill the task entrusted to every evangelizer.

Paul VI noted that “It is the Holy Spirit who, today just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows oneself to be possessed and led by him” (EN 75). Mission demands a spirituality and “a life of complete docility to the Spirit” (RM 87).

Evangelizers continually deepen their awareness that they are cooperators in the Spirit’s work; they personally view themselves as the Spirit’s instruments, collaborators, partners, “team-mates,” and servants (2 Cor 4:1, 5; cf. AG 4). They claim nothing for themselves; all qualifications are from God; everything is “of the Spirit” for it is “the Spirit that gives life” (2 Cor 3:4-6).

Francis Xavier Ford, a missionary to China in the early decades of this century, opens his *Come, Holy Spirit* with an affirmation: “Our work will never save souls. It is immaterial where we are and what we do; the thing that matters is who we are and what we intend.” He asserts that missionaries only advance in their vocation and sanctity “with the help of God the Holy Spirit.” “Apostles have a special need of the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit to be a light to their hearts”; they “have urgent need to warm their hearts at the fire of God the Holy Spirit.”

Nothing can replace “the gentle action of the Spirit” (EN 75),

who is "the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission" (RM 21). All evangelization begins with self-evangelization in the Spirit (cf. EN 15).

Personally transformed and Spirit-filled evangelizers are signs that are well received today. "Modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (EN 41; cf. RM 42). Personal intimacy with the Holy Spirit is an essential, "practical," and accurate barometer of the effective evangelizer. Yes, it is the Holy Spirit who "illuminates and enflames the whole person with divine love." ²

FONT OF SCRIPTURE

The centrality of Sacred Scripture in missiological reflection is another contemporary signpost of the Spirit. Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament describe the presence, experience, and effects of the Spirit. While occupying an important role in the Old Testament, the Spirit’s presence and action is central in the New Testament. Here one finds the overwhelming conviction that the time of fulfillment has dawned and God’s Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh (cf. Acts 2:14-39); this has been accomplished in Jesus the Christ, the anointed one.

An important way in which the uniqueness and centrality of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in the New Testament is in terms of his unique relation to the Spirit of God. In a word, Jesus himself is preeminently a person of the Spirit; likewise, evangelizers imitate Jesus in their receptivity to the continual action of the Spirit in their lives.

Luke notes the outpouring of the Spirit in the events surrounding the conception and infancy of Jesus (Lk 1:35, 41, 67; 2:25-27). The same Spirit descends on Jesus at the moment of his baptism (Mt 3:17); he is led by the Spirit to the desert (Mt 4:1); he returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:14); he begins his preaching mission at Nazareth asserting that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Lk 4:18).

These accounts of Jesus' baptism, testing, and ministry are

theological and pastoral affirmations. They concern not only the identity and mission of Jesus, but the identity and mission of disciple-evangelizers who journey on the Lord’s way. In following Jesus, they are plunged into the baptism of Jesus, willingly accepting it as their own. This baptism in the Spirit becomes fully manifest in Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.

As Jesus was empowered by the Spirit, he in turn sends forth his own disciples saying: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22). Peter (Acts 4:8), Paul (Acts 9:17), and Stephen (Acts 6:5; 7:55), as well as those who listened to their preaching (Acts 10:44), were all filled with the Spirit. The entire nascent Church brims with the Spirit’s presence (Acts 2:4); the community increases while it enjoys the consolation of the befriending Spirit (Acts 9:31).

Jesus’ entire existence transpires in the Holy Spirit: from conception through baptism to ministry and salvific death, culminating in resurrected life in the Spirit. Similarly, the Christian community is conceived, baptized, fulfilled and glorified in and through the transforming Spirit. This same paradigm is the criterion for every evangelizer.

Because the “name of Jesus” and the “power of the Spirit” are the constants of Christian life and mission, evangelizers will always look to Scripture to anchor their missionary activity in what may be termed a “Christocentric Pneumatology.” Scripture, the inspired Word of God, is a perennial guidepost. To paraphrase Saint Jerome: Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

WORLDWIDE HORIZONS

Another signpost proclaims that God’s mysterious, animating, inspiring presence through the Spirit extends to all reality. Vatican II speaks of the Spirit of the Lord, “who fills the whole earth” (GS 11); it is God’s Spirit with a marvelous providence who “directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth” (GS 26). The Council affirms that humanity “is constantly worked upon by God’s Spirit” (GS 41); his action is operative “not only for Christians, but for all people of good will in whose heart grace works in an unseen way” (GS 22).
A Spirit-inspired openness to the modern world became a clear thrust of Vatican II. The Church was urged to seek new approaches and forms of evangelization and to discern the Spirit’s presence within secular movements and events. Dialogue with the world was no longer something just useful for the Church; it became imperative because the Spirit’s voice could be discerned there. Secular reality can often manifest humanity’s legitimate desires and aspirations, its struggle for peace, justice, and human dignity. Thus, Christians need to acknowledge that the Spirit of God is present within these developments ("Spiritus Dei . . . huic evolutioni adest" — GS 26). Or again, the Spirit “is not only close to this world but present in it, and in a sense immanent, penetrating it and giving it life from within” (DeV 54).

Recognizing the Spirit’s action beyond the bounds of the Christian community continues to be a clear “signpost” for the Church today. John Paul II has urged evangelizers to take note of “the effects of the Spirit of Truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body” (RH 6; cf. DeV 53). Most recently he has noted that the “Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions” (RM 28). This awareness provides the foundations for missionary activity in the arenas of inculturation, social justice, interreligious dialogue, and ecology.

The worldwide horizons of the Spirit’s activity enable evangelizers to see with new eyes. Reality has its ultimate rootedness in God; humanity shares a fundamental unity; reality and creation exude a sense of holiness; the Spirit continually renews all creation.

Evangelizers remain fundamentally realists as well as optimists; they are filled with faith and hope. Indeed, there are clear signs of suffering, injustice, and death present in the world; they need no enumeration. But, radical Christian hope remains based on the certainty of the Spirit’s presence and Christ’s victory in the world. To offer this vision to contemporary humanity is a great missionary service!

COMMUNITY OF CHARISMS

The four “Signposts of the Spirit” already presented ideally
coalesce to shape Christian believers into a community-in-mission, a Church-for-others. Thus, a refashioned model of “living Church” emerges from the renewal of Vatican II; it demands personal commitment and transformation; it anchors itself in Scripture; it engages the contemporary world. The life-giving Spirit (Vivificantem) is at work, animating the entire process.

A variety of images can serve to present the unique reality of the Church: People of God, Body of Christ, Bride of Christ, Sheepfold, etc. However, one image which explicitly highlights the action of the Holy Spirit in the body views the Church as a “Community of Charisms.” Y. Congar has noted that “One of the most important ways in which the Holy Spirit has been restored to the pneumatological ecclesiology of the Council was in the sphere of the charisms.”3 The Council spoke frequently about Spirit-inspired charisms in a renewed ecclesiology.

The Holy Spirit, “alloting His gifts ‘to everyone according as he will’ (1 Cor 12:11) . . . , distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church” (LG 12). “From the reception of these charisms or gifts, including those which are less dramatic, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the church and in the world for the good of humanity and for the upbuilding of the Church” (AA 3).

Charisms result from the free choice and gift of the Holy Spirit; they manifest the animating role of the Spirit in the Church. Recipients need to be open, docile, and faithful to the Holy Spirit’s action. The variety and diversity of gifts does not harm unity; diversity flourishes. “There are different gifts but always the same Spirit; there are different ministries but the same Lord” (1 Cor 12:4-5). To be church is to delight in diversity!

In a unique way the variety of charisms manifests the missionary nature of the Church. Many gifts are needed to accomplish the variety of tasks which are essential to the Church’s mission. Each gift has a special function and enables Christians to mature

together into a united, yet diverse, community. This fundamentally charismatic structure of the Church is, in itself, a special gift and a sign of the Spirit.

A new mission theology, linked to a new program of diverse ministries, is giving the Church a new face; it is quite different from an earlier pyramidal ecclesiology. This too is a manifestation of the Spirit’s action. The Church is being built up with a great wealth of gifts and, as a result, mission will be better served.

INDUCTIVE APPROACHES

The five thematic signposts already discussed collectively indicate an additional mission approach: employment of inductive theological and pastoral methods. Dynamic approaches to mission continue to “emerge from below” under the Spirit’s guidance. Concrete examples best illustrate this reality.

As Christians prayerfully reflect in the light of revelation on the events, movements, and realities of their lives, they begin to give form and shape to local theologies; pneumatology itself emerges and is enhanced in this process. These same Christians will recognize how their own community-based charisms can serve to address local situations and challenges — whether they be social, political, economic or religious.

This action of the Spirit in the community fosters the growth of authentic local churches as concrete realizations of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church (cf. LG 26). The Church as a whole becomes recognized as a “communion of churches” or “body of the churches,” with the Holy Spirit as the principle of that communion (cf. LG 13, 23; AG 19-22; UR 2). A practical theology and personal experience of the true catholicity of the Church thus finds its expression. In this atmosphere, ecumenism can also be fostered.

The whole field of inculturation now opens to the promptings of the Spirit: Church discipline, liturgical forms, pastoral initiatives, religious life, catechetical methods, as well as approaches to mission and evangelization (RM 52-54).

Inductive approaches in all areas of church life allow for creativity and broad participation linked with responsibility and
accountability. Each individual part or member of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the entire Church and world. In this process the Spirit is variously manifested as Counsellor, Intercessor, Advocate, and Comforter, keeping contemporary evangelizers faithful to the life, teachings, and mission of Jesus himself. The Church thus grows as an outpouring of the Spirit, as a credible sign and sacrament of God’s unfolding Kingdom.

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

A positive appraisal of the world’s various religious traditions is certainly a remarkable “signpost of the Spirit” in recent times. It is important to note that Vatican II is the first and only Council to speak positively of other religions. World religions contain “precious things, both religious and human” (GS 92), “seeds of contemplation” (AG 18), “elements of truth and grace” (AG 9), “seeds of the Word” (AG 11, 15), and “rays of that Truth which enlightens all human beings” (NA 2); all believers “are related in various ways to the People of God” (LG 16). No one can doubt “the active presence and life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit” within these religions.4

It is imperative for the reflective missionary to explore the significance of this universal life-giving activity of the Spirit for both the members of these religious traditions as well as for the Church and her mission. Although three decades have elapsed since Vatican II, comprehending this new reality (and its practical consequences for mission) has hardly begun. The basic challenge will be to fully explore “the economy of the Holy Spirit.”

Missiology will be forced to look at its theological foundations of mission as *missiones Trinitatis*, which will be an improvement over the common *missio Dei*. The closer the Church gets to the proper role of the Spirit, the better it will be able to delineate the Spirit’s role in the salvation process. The pneumatological perspective will probably have the advantage over a Christological

approach in understanding the religious experience of the followers of other faith traditions. And yet, one must never set Christocentrism and pneumatology in opposition, as if they functioned as two distinct economies.

Theoretically and practically, missiology will need to explore several questions: What is the meaning of asserting that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the world, in the members of other religions, and in the religious traditions themselves? How is the Spirit present in every authentic prayer? What is the Spirit’s role in fostering true human values, virtues, and social responsibility? How can the Church and all humanity profit from the wisdom traditions of the great religions? What is the meaning of true dialogue and interfaith encounter? What are its pitfalls and limits?

Two important Church bodies have begun grappling with these questions. Significant contributions have come from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in its documents *Dialogue and Mission* (Pentecost, 1984) and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (Pentecost, 1991). The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences has done groundbreaking work in this area; FABC published the lengthy and insightful “Theological Theses on Interreligious Dialogue” in 1987.

Following this “signpost” will be a demanding task for evangelizers. Theological questions abound and practical difficulties often have no clear solutions. However, retreat or disengagement are not mature responses. This is clearly one area of renewal that will demand extraordinary openness to God’s Spirit. Practically, missioners should look for signs of the Spirit, remembering that God is encountered, experienced and confessed before God is reflected upon in more systematic concepts. Boldness, a special gift of the Spirit, is needed in this challenging area (cf. RM 24, 55-57).

**ADDITIONAL SIGNPOSTS**

This presentation has carried the pilgrim, missionary Church along many diverse paths indicated by the transforming action of the Holy Spirit. Many additional signposts still appear on the horizon. In a brief and summary fashion this essay now presents some of these additional manifestations of the Spirit at work in
our times both in the Church and in the world.

Following the Spirit’s lead in Vatican II, the Church clearly sees herself as being present and active both in the world and for the world. This opening to the world and to an integral vision of evangelization forms the basis for her commitment to human development and the promotion of a just social order.

The Church specifically serves humanity by fostering the action of the Spirit — already present in the world. Promotion of human values (social justice, individual and social rights, the liberation of the poor, oppressed and outcasts) becomes an expression of her evangelizing mission in so far as it is patterned on Jesus’ life and mission and done in the power of the Spirit.

Frequently, Church social ministry will unfold in ecumenical and interreligious collaboration with the many people of good will — as they are moved by the Spirit; it will often focus on broadly secular needs which are decisive for the existence and the future of humanity. In the midst of materialism and consumerism, “things of the Spirit” are often lost; here is a concrete and practical arena of missionary activity.

Following on the earlier discussion of the Church as a “community of charisms,” proper attention must be devoted to the important emerging role of the laity in the Church. Vatican II has encouraged the Church to appreciate “the unmistakable work of the Holy Spirit in making the laity today even more conscious of their own responsibility and inspiring them everywhere to serve Christ and the Church” (AA 1).

One cannot but admire the great wealth of gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit on lay members of the Church in our age: lay mission movements; Christian service in the complicated world of politics, society, economics and communications on local, national, and international levels; supervision of charitable works and administrators of Church resources. The lay faithful who, responding to the Spirit received in Baptism and Confirmation, give themselves to a variety of ministries are a tremendous resource for evangelization.

The Spirit that moved John XXIII to convene Vatican II enlightened him to identify ecumenism and “common witness” as a contemporary priority for the Church. The Catholic Church recognizes that the Christian Churches “are joined with us in the
Holy Spirit" (LG 15) and that "the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as a means of salvation" (UR 3).

Ecumenical cooperation in mission is founded upon faith in the Spirit's capacity to use the diversity of the many Christian ecclesial communities to advance Kingdom and Gospel values in human society. Unfortunately, ecumenism appears to have been eclipsed in many local churches around the world. How can the churches more closely listen to the promptings of the Spirit and work more effectively and ecumenically?

Another contemporary trend calling for a renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit is the area of ecology. Humanity needs an enhanced ecological consciousness. In many parts of the world an apparent loss of the sense of the sacredness of the physical world has led to serious pollution of the physical environment; "creation is being made subject to futility" (Rom 8:20).

Christian missionary dedication can validly focus on setting creation "free from slavery to corruption to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). A renewed awareness of God's presence through the Holy Spirit can contribute to a greater respect for all forms of God's immanence in creation, including that vision necessary to recover an ecological balance so important for the present and future generations.

LIVING INTO MYSTERY

Christian mission can be described in a variety of ways; John Taylor notes that "mission means finding out what God is doing and trying to do it with him." This lengthy piece has attempted to describe several "signposts of the Spirit" as they influence both the theory and practice of mission today. Now, the actual task lies ahead; the doing remains.

How are evangelizers to engage in the "doing"? They must seek to intimately live into the mystery of God. Scripture itself speaks of the maturity to which Christians are called (1 Cor 2:6; Heb 6:1); they are to be imbued and animated by the Spirit, to become Spirit-filled people — pneumatikoi (1 Cor 3:1). They are

to be led by the Spirit into living the mystery of Christ, the One sent by the Father. Signposts mean little if the pilgrim does not act upon the directions they give.

"Living into mystery" means modeling one's life on the will of the Father, in union with the crucified-risen Lord, through the power of the Spirit. Mission spirituality is, at its foundation, a Spirit-inspired Trinitarian experience. Reflection and prayer allow the Spirit to transform and anoint one for mission and to experience a sending forth by the Spirit's power. The Spirit-filled person (pneumatikon) becomes absorbed in the loving plan of salvation (mysterion) that God has for all people.

God's salvific plan comes to its perfection in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the paschal mystery, the saving act par excellence. This is the central message and common kerygma of the New Testament. In addition, the Scriptures link the bestowal of the Spirit to Christ's paschal mystery and to the transformation of death itself into new life. To paraphrase Taylor, this is "what God is doing" and all missions continue "trying to do it with him."

Vatican II recognized this deep insight when it noted: "we [Christians] must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal mystery" (GS 22). In a word, missionary activity is designed to incorporate all people into God's loving plan of salvation through the Spirit-given sharing in the Paschal Mystery.⁶

Plumbing the profound depths of God's love becomes a lifetime adventure in faith; sharing this experience with others is at the heart of mission. All the "Signposts of the Spirit" are designed to help the pilgrim Church accomplish this task with greater love and effectivity. As John Paul II has noted: "The Church cannot prepare for the new millennium 'in any other way than in the Holy Spirit'" (TMA 44). Mission continually unfolds the perennial mystery of Pentecost.

It is Patriarch Athenagoras who has given expression to the

special role of the Holy Spirit in salvation and mission in most felicitous terms.

WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT:
— God is far away,
— Christ stays in the past,
— the Gospel is a dead letter,
— the Church is simply an organization,
— authority a matter of domination,
— mission a matter of propaganda,
— the liturgy no more than an evocation,
— Christian living a slave morality.

BUT IN THE HOLY SPIRIT:
— the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth-pangs of the Kingdom,
— the risen Christ is there,
— the Gospel is the power of life,
— the Church shows forth the life of the Trinity,
— authority is a liberating service,
— mission is a Pentecost,
— the liturgy is both memorial and anticipation,
— human action is deified.7

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

AA — *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Apostolate of the Laity: Nov. 18, 1965)
AG — *Ad Gentes* (Missionary Activity: Dec. 7, 1965)
DV — *Dei Verbum* (Divine Revelation: Nov. 18, 1965)
DeV — *Dominum et Vivificantem* (On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World: May 18, 1986)
EN — *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World: Dec. 8, 1975)

LG — Lumen Gentium (The Church: Nov. 21, 1964)
NA — Nostra Aetate (World Religions: Oct. 28, 1965)
RH — Redemptor Hominis (Mystery of Redemption and Human Dignity: March 4, 1979)
TMA — Tertio Millennio Adveniente (The Coming Third Millennium: Nov. 10, 1994)
UR — Unitatis Redintegratio (Ecumenism: Nov. 21, 1964)

ADDITIONAL SELECTED REFERENCES