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**HOLY SPIRIT -
SOURCE AND FOUNDATION
OF OLD TESTAMENT SPIRITUALITY**

- PHD THESIS -

- SUMMARY -

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Content

List of Abbreviations.....	4
Introduction.....	5
1. Semantic and conceptual delimitations.....	16
1.1 The meaning and meaning of the term "ruah" in the Old Testament.....	17
1.2 Symbolism and designations of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament texts	25
2. The Spirit of God in the Pentateuch.....	30
2.1 The Spirit of God and His carriage over the waters (Phil 1:2)	36
2.2 The Spirit of God and the "breath of life" (Phil 2:7)	43
2.3. Strong winds and the parting of the Red Sea (Jas 14)	45
3. The Holy Spirit in the historical books	59
3.1 The cloud in Solomon's temple (3 Kg 8)	66
3.2. The Prophet Elijah and the gentle breeze.....	72
4. The Holy Spirit in prophetic writings	82
4.1 The Spirit of God in the Prophet Isaiah	83
4.1.1 The Spirit of God and the Seven Spirits (Chapter 11)	87
4.1.2 The Spirit on the Servant of the Lord	90
4.1.3 The Spirit in Isaian theology.....	96
4.2 The Prophet Joel and the outpouring of the Spirit (3:1-5).....	99
4.3. The vision of the field of bones and the restoring Spirit (Jas 37).....	106
5. The Holy Spirit in the Psalms and Wisdom Literature	113
5.1 The Spirit of God in the Psalms	113
5.1.1 The Spirit and the spiritual renewal of man (Ps 51)	120
5.1.2 The sending of the Spirit in the "psalm of creation" (Ps 104)	126
5.2 The Holy Spirit and Hochma (wisdom) in the Wisdom Books	131
5.2.1 The Spirit in Solomon's Proverbs	132
5.2.2 The Spirit in the Wisdom of Solomon	135
5.2.3 The Spirit in the Book of Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach	137
6. Theological perspectives	138

6.1 The Spirit of God - the source of Old Testament spirituality.....	138
6.2 The Holy Spirit and his presence in liturgical acts	143
6.3 The Holy Spirit and mystical knowledge.....	154
6.4 The Holy Spirit in acts of experiencing God	160
6.5 Experiencing the Holy Spirit in the conception of Chiara Lubich.....	175
Conclusions.....	192
Annex. Chiara Lubich - on the Holy Spirit	194
Bibliography	201

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Old Testament spirituality is deeply rooted in the relationship between God and His chosen people, Israel. This special relationship is mediated by the presence of the Holy Spirit, who breathes life into the hearts and minds of the Jews. It is the Spirit who makes possible an authentic and living relationship with the Divine. From the very beginning, when God created man in His own image and likeness, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. This divine breath is the Spirit who gives mankind the ability to live in communion with the Creator. Later, the Spirit descends upon the prophets and leaders of the chosen people, endowing them with wisdom and power to represent God. The Spirit is also present in the Temple, the place where heaven meets earth. The spirituality of the people of Israel is rooted in the covenant between Yahweh and the sons of Abraham. By obeying the Law revealed to Moses, the Jews live in harmony with God's will. Without the Spirit's help, however, observance of the Law is reduced to a series of formal obligations, losing its deeper spiritual meaning. The goal is a dynamic, life-giving relationship, not just outward compliance with rules. In essence, Old Testament spirituality means a life lived in the light and power of God's Spirit. It is a dynamic, living, personal relationship with Yahweh. It is the experience of the presence of the Most High, filling hearts with joy, hope and wisdom. It is the sincere desire to live in the Creator's will, to reflect His holiness.

In the first chapter of our paper, we made the necessary semantic and conceptual delimitations. The "Spirit" (of God/the Lord) (*ruah Elohim/YHWH*) plays an important, though often behind the scenes, role in the Old Testament. There is no systematic presentation in the Old Testament of a theology of the Spirit (or anything else, for that matter), but the Spirit we encounter periodically in its history. It is the Spirit of God who gives life, order, and wisdom on both cosmic and historical levels. He manifests divine will and providence, either through natural phenomena or through the endowment of leaders. The concept of the Spirit underlines the strict monotheism of Old Testament revelation. The presence of the Spirit is usually regarded as beneficial and empowering, even by pagans, to whom it also provides revelation. The Spirit descends upon many people to empower them in a special way for a leadership role, such as judge, prophet, king or Messiah. There is also evidence of a wider function of the Spirit beyond that relating to individuals. In Isaiah, Yahweh's Spirit and his words remain not only with the prophet, but with his children and their descendants forever (Is 59:21). The office of prophet is not hereditary, but their role here seems to be seen as

extending beyond their official function to many others. God also promises to place his Spirit during his people, who will be restored after the punishment of exile, enabling them to adhere to the commandments of his covenant (Ez 36:27; cf 39:29). The context indicates that the Spirit is not a force acting externally on people, but rather an element in their inner being, as stated in 36:26: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you". The Spirit gives life to the nation (37:14), renewing their freshness and vitality, like water in the desert.

In the second chapter, entitled *The Spirit of God in the Pentateuch*, we have focused on some passages relevant to this study. The Spirit is present in the act of creation as Creator and in creation as Preacher. In Genesis, chapter 1, the Spirit of God is depicted as hovering above the primordial waters before the creation of the world, an image suggesting that the Spirit had an active role in the act of creation, as a force that gives life and orders the original chaos. Later interpretations see the Spirit hovering over the waters as prefiguring Christian baptism. In chapter 2 of the Book of Acts, God breathes into man a breath of life, making him a living being. The divine breath is linked to the uniqueness and special dignity of man as *imago Dei*. It is a continuous creative act that sustains the whole of humanity. From a Christian perspective, the breath of God prefigures the spiritual revival brought by Christ. During the exodus from Egypt (Ex 14), the Spirit of God is portrayed as a mighty wind that blows the way through the Red Sea and brings confusion to the Egyptian camp. Providential control over the phenomena of nature manifests the power of God working for the salvation of the chosen people. In particular, the Spirit fills Joshua as Moses' successor to lead the people to Canaan. The Spirit of wisdom is essential for the leaders of the chosen people. In general, the Old Testament presents the Spirit as a dynamic force through which God intervenes in history and nature to fulfil his plans. The whole history of the Chosen People is integrated by the Fathers into a complex typological system that structures biblical revelation around figures who prepare for fulfilment in Christ. Thus, although initially centred on God's revelation in the history of the Jewish people, the biblical concept of the Spirit is expanded by the Fathers to include the entire economy of salvation. It becomes the bridge that connects the two Testaments and integrates revelation into a unified whole. Concrete history is transfigured to reveal universal spiritual truths. And the Spirit of God is the glue that cements the unity and continuity of the biblical message to man.

The third chapter, *The Holy Spirit in the Historical Books*, deals with the occupations of the Spirit in Solomon and the prophet Elijah, two prominent figures in whom we can see the work of the Spirit. At Solomon's coronation as king, the Spirit of God is visibly at work through the prophet Nathan, who anoints the young Solomon as his father David's heir. Thus, the new

king is endowed with the wisdom and skill he needs to lead his people. Solomon's wisdom becomes proverbial in biblical history and is recognised as a special gift of the Holy Spirit. A highlight of Solomon's reign is the sanctification of the Temple, built at God's command as a place of divine glory among the chosen people. At the king's dedication prayer, the cloud of God's glory fills the Temple, symbolizing God's presence and revelation among the people. This event marks a new stage in God's relationship with Israel, as the focal point of divine manifestation now becomes the Temple, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. In the life of the prophet Elijah, we can also trace in a fascinating way the active work of God's Spirit. For example, in times of famine, the Spirit sends Elijah to a widow in Zarephath of Sidon who will help him with food. Then, in the confrontation on Mount Carmel, the Spirit of God empowers Elijah to defeat the prophets of Baal and convince the Israelites to renounce idolatry. After a period of discouragement and exhaustion, Elijah reaches the cave on Mount Horeb where he has a profound encounter with God. There he experiences God's presence not in a grand phenomenon, but in the "gentle breeze of the wind", a discreet but meaningful revelation of God's gentle nature. Finally, Elijah's earthly mission ends with a symbolic gesture full of theological significance, namely his ascension to heaven in a chariot of fire. The Spirit of God thus lifts Elijah from the earth, opening the prospect of eternal life for all believers. So, in the accounts of Solomon and Elijah we see the concrete way in which the Spirit of God works in the history of the chosen people. By endowing them with wisdom, strength and courage, the Spirit helps these leaders of Israel to fulfil their destiny. And through revelation and direct guidance, he makes himself known as an active and life-giving divine person. Thus, from the Old Testament we discover the richness of meaning of the Spirit's ministry among God's people.

In the fourth chapter, entitled *The Holy Spirit in the Prophetic Writings*, we turn our attention first to Isaiah, one of the prophets in which the theme of the Spirit is prominent, appearing 11 times, then to Joel, who prophesies a universal outpouring of God's Spirit in the "last days", and finally to the prophet Ezekiel, where the Spirit plays an important role in the inner renewal of the chosen people. Of all the prophetic books of the Old Testament, the book of the prophet Isaiah is the one in which the theme of the Holy Spirit is treated most fully and deeply. From the moment of his call to ministry, Isaiah receives the outpouring of the Spirit, described as "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord" (Is 11:2). Thus endowed, Isaiah proclaims God's judgments on the disobedience of the people, but also the hope of a Savior who will come and bring a new creation. One of Isaiah's clearest messianic prophecies is of a Descendant from the stem of

Jesse, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord will rest (Is 11:1-2). This Child described by Isaiah is a foreshadowing of Christ himself, anointed by the Holy Spirit for his saving work. Isaiah also speaks of a "Servant of the Lord" who will carry the message of salvation to the ends of the earth, filled with the Spirit of God (Is 42:1). Isaiah's themes of the Holy Spirit include the promise of the Spirit's outpouring on all God's people (Is 32:15; 44:3), not just the elect, and the idea of judgment by the Spirit of God (Is 4:4; 28:6). The Spirit is also the source of eternal life for the new creation anticipated by the prophet (Is 32:15). Isaiah therefore offers a comprehensive vision of the Spirit's work in salvation history.

Another prophet in whom the Holy Spirit plays a prominent role is Joel, who proclaims a universal outpouring of God's Spirit "on every creature" (Joel 2:28) in the "last days! This outpouring of the Spirit will accompany God's judgments and the final restoration of the world. Joel's prophecy of the universal outpouring of the Spirit was partially fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2) but awaits its full fulfillment at Christ's second coming. Finally, the book of the prophet Ezekiel also contains major themes about the Holy Spirit, especially in terms of the spiritual renewal of the people. For example, Ezekiel has a vision of a field of dry bones upon which the breath of life from God's Spirit is poured out, bringing them back to life (Ez 37). This symbolizes the spiritual resurrection of Israel under the life-giving influence of the Spirit. Likewise, Ezekiel proclaims an inward renewal by the Spirit of the Lord, who will remove the heart of stone and give it one of flesh, subject to the divine will (Ez 36:26-27). Thus the teaching about the Holy Spirit is amply developed in the writings of the major Old Testament prophets. They anticipate the universal outpouring of the Spirit in the messianic age, His role in the Savior's work, and the Spirit's regenerating activity in the human heart. These insights will be perfected in the New Testament revelation of the relationship of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity and the Son's saving and sanctifying mission of the Spirit. But as early as the writings of the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is revealed as the major divine actor in salvation history.

The fifth chapter, *The Holy Spirit in the Psalms and Wisdom Literature*, looks at Psalm 51 (The Spirit and the Spiritual Renewal of Man) and Psalm 104 (The Spirit's Reference in the Psalm of Creation), and then, outside the book of Psalms, we have sought a deeper connection of the term Spirit with the meaning of "the spirit of God" and "wisdom" as its gift. Three sapiential books are examined here: the book of Solomon's Proverbs and the books of the Wisdom of Solomon and Jesus Sirach. In the book of Psalms, we find significant references to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. For example, Psalm 51 expresses the psalmist's prayer for a clean heart and a renewed spirit from God. Thus, it is the Spirit who does the work of inner renewal in man, cleansing him from sin and giving him a new spirit, alive in communion

with God. This theme of spiritual regeneration by the Spirit will be amply developed in the New Testament. Another relevant text is Psalm 104, also known as the "psalm of creation". Here the Spirit is sent by God to renew the face of the earth and restore life to the world. We can thus see the work of the Creator Spirit from the very beginning, but also His ongoing work of recreating and reviving creation. The sending of the Spirit restores the original beauty and harmony of the world.

Beyond the Book of Psalms, in Old Testament wisdom literature we often find a deep connection between the Spirit of God and wisdom. For example, in the Proverbs of Solomon, wisdom is described as "the breath of the Almighty" (Prov 21:12), and the Spirit of God is its source. Wisdom is a gift of the Spirit given to man to guide him in the right way. Similarly, in the books Wisdom of Solomon and Jesus Sirach, wisdom is God's own Holy Spirit come down from heaven to work in man. It is "the breath of God's power, a pure ray of the glory of the Almighty" (Wisdom 7:25). God's wisdom is poured into man's soul as "a holy Spirit, unique, many-sided, subtle, moving, penetrating" to teach and sanctify him (Wisdom 7:22-23). Thus the Old Testament Wisdom literature reveals the profound connection between the Holy Spirit and divine Wisdom. The Spirit is the fountainhead of wisdom that enlightens the mind, ennoble the heart, and leads man's life in the right path. Through His gift of wisdom, the Spirit brings His sanctifying fruits into the lives of believers. These Old Testament perspectives on the Spirit's relationship to wisdom anticipate the New Testament teaching on the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth who guides us into all truth (In 16:13), and on the fruit of the Spirit as the manifestation of divine wisdom in the life of the believer (Gal 5:22-23). Thus, from the very beginning the Holy Spirit is revealed as the bearer and giver of heavenly wisdom in the history of God's people.

Finally, the sixth chapter deals with some theological perspectives on Old Testament spirituality and how it is received in the Church's experience. We examine, in turn, the Holy Spirit and His presence in liturgical acts, the Holy Spirit and mystical knowledge, the Holy Spirit in acts of experiencing God, and Experiencing the Holy Spirit in the conception of Chakra Lubich.

In the course of this research, we have pursued three main objectives: First of all, we have aimed at revealing the elements that testify to the action realism of the Spirit in the Old Testament, in all the above-mentioned occupations. Secondly, by showing His work in salvation history, we sought to argue exegetically for the personal realism of the Spirit. Finally, turning to symbol, metaphor, allegory, we have presented forms of revelation of the ministry

and personal realism and forms of affirmation and preservation of the Holy Spirit's transcendence, such as the Holy Spirit as fire, heat, breath, etc.

The work includes an exegetical approach to the places in our field of research, with morpho-syntactic exegesis and doctrinal synthesis/systematization. In the research approach we make use of diachronic exegesis and textual criticism of the relevant scriptural passages, using the historical-critical method as well as the theoretical-patristic one. In this respect we refer to Hebrew commentaries, which interpret the text from the perspective of the first recipients of the scriptural message. Then, as far as the patristic commentaries are concerned, here both the literal-historical and the transcendent-spiritual meanings are preserved and highlighted. Modern commentaries continue the reception of the scriptural text in a contemporary context. People's experiences and encounters with God, recorded in the books of Scripture, are continued to the present day. Cross-reading the ancient-testamentary texts highlights the fact that the Holy Spirit is the main actor of revelation and access to the transcendent.

The first of the meanings of *rûah* that we find in scriptural texts is that of breath, which appears early in the Old Testament, in the Book of Acts, where it is explicit that God is the source of human breath, "breath" representing human energy. Sometimes the term becomes a synonym for *nepeš*, "soul" or "vital force", and *lēb*, "heart", including intelligence and will.

The Hebrew *rûah* refers not only to the life given to mankind by God. God's Spirit came upon people and empowered them for a special ministry, such as that of king or prophet. Prophecy was understood as a sign of the presence of God's spirit. The spirit of God was expected to be poured out in abundance in the future as well. The ancient Hebrews understood that God's power was everywhere, that it was personal and yet great and transcendent.

The Old Testament uses the term *Holy Spirit* (*rûah qādoš*) only three times; however, in the New Testament it appears about 90 times. Most of the time, the divine Spirit is referred to by expressions such as the *Spirit of God/the Lord, my Spirit/ His Spirit*, etc.

Looking at the Holy Scriptures, we find numerous correspondences between the presence of the Spirit of the Lord in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, as the Spirit of life-giving, restorative and resurrection. The Pentateuch is imbued with two important ideas: divine intervention and interaction between God and man. It can be said to be a historical work, incorporating various sources. A third of its content deals with moral laws and instructions.

We can see that the fundamental idea expressed by the biblical name of the Spirit is that of a dynamic impulse, comparable to the power of the wind, capable of transforming everything. In the Bible, the primary function of the Spirit is not to make understood, but to set

in motion; not to enlighten, but to communicate a certain powerful dynamism. However, this aspect is not exclusive. Other aspects are also expressed, which prepare the subsequent revelation. Firstly, the aspect of interiority. The term "breath" in fact penetrates inside the human being. In biblical language, this can be expressed as God putting His Spirit into the hearts of men. Sometimes the gift of the Spirit is also bestowed on those who, though not leaders, are called by God to perform a service at certain times and in certain circumstances.

In the creation account, after the initial mention of the spirit or breath of God hovering over the waters, we no longer find the word "*ruah*", the Hebrew name for spirit. However, the way in which the creation of man is described suggests a relationship with the spirit or breath of God. Thus, Holy Scripture makes it clear that God intervened through His breath or spirit to make man a being in which the spirit of God is present.

The deep symbolic understanding of spiritual realities is characteristic of the patristic perspective on Scripture. Concrete episodes and images are integrated by the Fathers into a complex typological system that structures the whole meaning of biblical revelation. The crossing of the Red Sea thus becomes an essential link in the chain of symbols that articulates man's spiritual experience as the fulfilment of the meanings figured in the biblical story. The prophetic texts that refer to the sending of the Holy Spirit are oracles in which God speaks to the hearts of his people.

Throughout the history of the people of Israel God reveals Himself to them by giving them a spiritual life and by manifesting Himself as the source of this life. The Spirit of God is not immediately recognized as Holy and the principle of sanctification on the part of the people. If the Bible attributes, however, certain manifestations to the Spirit of God, it is mainly because this unexpected, inner force, which does not come from man, produces astonishing effects which are obviously desired by God according to his demands and promises: the freedom and faithfulness of his people.

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is above all a promise. The open heavens, a Father God come to earth, the Old Testament prayer will be fulfilled by Jesus Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The active work of the Holy Spirit is experienced, especially in Orthodox worship, in the Church and her Mysteries, at the heart of which is the Eucharist. It is through the sacraments that the grace of the Holy Spirit is imparted to the faithful - as a gift - and poured out upon them. Through the Sacrament of the Anointing, "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit", divine grace is imparted for man's spiritual growth and fulfilment. In the Christian faith, the centrality

of contemplation and liturgical action keeps alive the original self-consciousness, inspired by that ever-renewed experience of the Spirit.

I approached the present study because of my personal experience of encountering a grace of the Holy Spirit, that of the spirituality of the Focolar Movement, which prompted this foray into the reality of the Old Testament, in search of the source, the wellspring of spiritual experiences that people of all times live, guided by the Spirit of God.

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