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The Work of the Holy Spirit in the World and in the Church

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THIS IS INDEED a challenging theme to which a single paper cannot do justice, not least because in Christian doctrine there has been the danger of 'domesticating the Holy Spirit' or of seeking to 'control the action of God to bring it within the compass of our own thinking'. That the Spirit 'bloweth where he listeth' and at his own dictate and not our own is not the least important Biblical insight into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This paper* will take for granted the classical doctrine of the Trinity, that God is one substance in three persons and that what we can trace of the action of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the world relates (to use a convenient medieval distinction) not to the procession but to the missions of the Holy Spirit. Whatever God does, he antecedently is and the operation of the Spirit depends upon his existence and not vice versa. Only so can the priority of God, the divine prevenience and initiative, be successfully maintained.

Three errors must be excluded at the outset.

1. There is a tendency, particularly in Charles Raven's book *The Creator Spirit* to allow the Holy Spirit to absorb the whole creative work of God. It is a sound principle of the classical theology that the external operations of the Holy Trinity are indivisible. There are no 'blank files' in the doctrine of the Trinity. If creation is specifically ascribed to the Father this does not imply the absence of the Son and the Spirit. The Father and the Spirit are both involved in the specific incarnation of the Son, while, if the Spirit is specifically the inspirer and the giver of life, this does not imply the absence of the Father or the Son.

2. There is a further danger in the doctrine of the church of working out our systems with insufficient regard for the role of the Spirit, and then to introduce him as a kind of safety device or escape mechanism to evade the full consequences of our conclusions. An appeal either to the uncovenanted mercies of God or to the overflow action of the

* Given at the Summer School at St. John's College, Durham, July 5th 1973.

Holy Spirit on behalf of those who fail to meet our more exacting requirements simply will not do. It is an indication that our criteria were framed too narrowly in the first instance.

3. A further danger lies in the assignment of too narrow a specialism to the action of the Holy Spirit. We must not attempt to make him (in John Mackay's phrase) the divine patron of ardour as against order. To this we must return later and here I suspect differences may arise in our discussion.

I The Holy Spirit in the World

IF we are right not to engross the whole creative activity of God in the operation of the Holy Spirit, it is nevertheless clear that he is deeply involved in the fact of divine immanence and its apprehension by us. It is through his action that disclosure situations which point to God occur in man's contemplation of the created order. These may not be directly or explicitly related to God, and yet be divine disclosures. The Psalmist's 'When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast created, Lord what is man?', or Wordsworth's 'Primrose by the river's brim', or a former Professor of Botany of Durham University who, while remaining an agnostic, once spoke of the wonder which his professional field of study evoked in him, were all pointing to disclosure situations, whether fully spelt out or not. This is not the whole story, of course, for these disclosure situations are merely pointers to the real presence of God within the created order. They occur and are realised by us through the action of the Holy Spirit only because God is already there encountering us. This claim of the mystical tradition we cannot dismiss as abruptly as for example Karl Barth appears to do. But just as the Incarnation cannot be reduced to terms of divine immanence, so the action of the Holy Spirit cannot stop here. In both cases the backcloth or starting point of the doctrine does not exhaust either its content or its significance. Equally those who wish to assert a greater speciality to the action of the Holy Spirit need not deny the reality or validity of this initial approach.

Moving up the scale of man's apprehension of God, it is through the operation of the Holy Spirit that Christians can claim all that is good or true or beautiful for God even where their original creators have not been explicit Christians or even known the name of Christ. In the early Christian centuries it was the Logos concept which was used to baptise the best of human effort into Christ. We need not go as far as Justin Martyr and speak of Christians before Christ, still less than Clement of Alexandria who seems almost to regard Greek philosophy as a kind of third Testament for Greeks additional to the Old and New Testaments. But here again is a further sphere of the action of the

Holy Spirit, not indeed canonising Plato, Aristotle, Kant or even Existentialism but authorising the use for Christian theology of insights which were originally independent of any Christian theological reference. This is merely an extension of Iam Ramsey's principle of disclosure situations, a more complex instance of the 'dropping of the penny'. It is however indispensable if we are to fulfil the tasks of being a Christian intellectual or of remaining within earshot of our contemporaries. Yet just as the Incarnation cannot be successfully reduced to divine immanence, so here the Christian revelation cannot be reduced either to mere disclosure situations in this sense, still less to the selection of an appropriate thought context or to the limits which this may seem to prescribe.

II The Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit

THE hinge on which the doctrine of the Holy Spirit turns lies within the New Testament. It was well said by Anderson Scott that the concept of the Holy Spirit lent ubiquity to the risen Christ, while his relation to the risen Christ added personality to the Old Testament concept of the Spirit. The theological problem with which the Apostolic Age was faced was to find terms to express and to clarify the continuing, self-identical impact of the risen Lord not only upon the original disciples but also upon others outside their number, of whom St. Paul is the classical prototype. Logos, Wisdom and Spirit were all employed for this purpose. While it would be risky to claim that St. Paul identified the risen Christ with the Holy Spirit, there is undoubtedly an overlap between them which is better described as a reciprocity of operations. Thus Christians can be described as both in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. In the Fourth Gospel the risen Christ inbreathes the Holy Spirit into his disciples. The Spirit is the 'other Paraclete' who will abide with the disciples for ever. He will take of the things of Christ and will reveal them to the church. The Holy Spirit may be described as the Vicar of Christ in the church. On the other hand this association with the risen Christ lent powerful support to the development of the concept of the personality of the Spirit. It would be generally agreed that the Old Testament concept of the Spirit is primarily that of a divine energy indwelling and gripping human lives. Both the older and the more developed concepts are found in the Acts of the Apostles though there is no doubt where the main accent falls. It must be admitted that a specific activity of the Spirit displayed in special charismata is characteristic of some parts of the New Testament, particularly the earlier chapters of Acts, 1 Corinthians and possibly Ephesians. Miraculous healings, speaking with tongues, discernment of human motives (leading in the case of Ananias and Sapphira to sudden death) occur within the apostolic

community. The life of the infant church was heavily charged with the operation of the Holy Spirit often working at a level of decisive action virtually unknown in modern times. We cannot tell how characteristic this was of the church as a whole. It is plainly evidenced for Jerusalem, Corinth and Ephesus. Not all the gifts of the Spirit have this spectacular and exceptional quality. The Seven, appointed for the pedestrian duty of 'serving tables' and distributing to the poor, were appointed through the action of the Holy Spirit. Some of the charismata mentioned by St. Paul have no ecstatic character. St. Paul, who, gives us the surprising information that he spoke with tongues 'more than you all', is alive to the dangers to which this gift had led at Corinth and points rather to *agapē* as exemplified in quite unspectacular duties as a more reliable index. Whether these more spectacular gifts were intended to be permanent or transitory phenomena is a matter of high debate on which more than one opinion can be held. Outcrop phenomena or abiding endowment, that is the question.

III *The Holy Spirit and the Church*

MORE important for our purpose is to note the overlap between the church as the body of Christ and the church as the Spirit-filled community. This parallels the overlap between the risen Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament. While in the New Testament the two concepts are convergent, in the history of the church they have often been treated in isolation or even in antithesis. Because of the frailty of churchmen it has proved easier to emphasise the one at the expense of the other, the institutional at the expense of the charismatic, but not both together. There is a close parallel in the doctrine of grace where Monergism and Synergism, both of which express characteristic features of the Christian life, have historically proved to be poles between which the doctrine has oscillated. We must try to trace this oscillation in church history and to offer some comments upon it. Theology has often proceeded by a process of action and reaction, not through a deliberate desire to stagger or to 'walk unruly' but because of the rich and many sided character of the divine realities themselves.

Relevant literature on the doctrine of the church has grown apace in recent years. The basic mapwork has been done by F. W. Dillstone in *The Structure of the Divine Society*, with his distinction between the organic and covenant doctrines of the church. Bishop Newbigin in *The Household of God* notes the way in which the old Catholic-Protestant divide has been extended by the addition of a third Pentecostalist voice. R. A. Knox's *Enthusiasm* traces the outcrop character of some Pentecostalist phenomena, while Nils Bloch-Hoell and Hollenweger offer masterly criticisms of Pentecostalism as an independent movement.

G. H. Williams' *The Radical Reformation* sets out the historical background into which the Pentecostalist movement can most naturally be fitted. The new fact is the way in which the charismatic movement has begun to affect the more traditional forms of church life. Literature on this subject is already beginning to accumulate.

1. *The Church as the Body of Christ*

MY main task here is to analyse the way in which the two overlapping concepts of the church in the New Testament have historically worked out in isolation from each other.

The concept of the church as the body of Christ appeals to one of the key images of St. Paul which expresses superbly the unity between Christ and his church and his application of it in 1 Corinthians to the necessity for the closest possible unity between Christians in the church. His accentuation of the relationship between Christ and the church may be confirmed by the fact that the new people of God received the nickname of 'Christians' rather than (let us say) 'Spiritualists', though it would be unfair to press the point too far. This view stresses the character of the church as an institution and can not unfairly be described as the organic view. It would claim that the normal activity of the church was as it were already steeped in the action of the Holy Spirit. Baptism, confirmation, the eucharist (notwithstanding the absence of an *epiclesis* of the Holy Spirit in Western Liturgies) and ordination are all related to the action of the Holy Spirit. The classical Protestant tradition would add that the ministry of the word can never be separated from the action of the Holy Spirit and lay considerable stress on the operation of the Spirit as the One who vehiculates to and actualises within the Christian believer the realities which the church exists to convey to mankind. Its pattern of spirituality can be described as incorporation.

Yet as the doctrine develops disquieting features make themselves felt. The concept of the church as the body of Christ, if taken in isolation from other aspects of the doctrine of the church, leads to the further step of describing it as the extension, even the prolongation of the Incarnation. While Calvin in his commentary on 1 Corinthians can note that St. Paul 'calls Christ the Church', it is much more doubtful whether we can properly call the church Christ. The main image must be qualified by the subsidiary but related image of the head and the members if the difference between God and man, which must be preserved even at the point of closest union, is not to become blurred. As Professor Moule has pointed out in *The Sacrifice of Christ* the formula 'in Christ' in the Pauline Epistles should never be taken apart from the parallel formula 'with Christ'. Again too exclusive an emphasis upon the phrase 'members of the body' can lead to a reduction

of the status of the Christian in the church to sub-personal terms. I have heard expressions and seen conduct which reduced the individual Christian to a functional or instrumental status against which the Reformers made a valid and much-needed protest. More difficult still is the tendency of the institutional view of the church to emphasise secondary (though still important) elements in the life of the church to a higher and more exalted status. The monepiscopate in apostolic succession is a notable example. This is the real point of Luther's distinction between the church *in via* and the church *in gloria* and the insistence that the former must always be seen under the cross. There is the danger in this approach of writing finality into what is merely provisional and secondary. That is why at the Lund Conference some German Lutherans accused those who adopted this approach to the church of 'anticipating the *eschaton*', and there was some justice in this contention. Too great an emphasis on the institutional elements in the Church's life seems to lead ultimately but inexorably to a static approach which by itself is not enough. There is a further serious difficulty which brings us back to our central theme. To read Dr. Mascall's *Christ, the Christian and the Church* or Mersch's masterly study *Le Corps Mystique du Christ* raises the question of the precise role of the Spirit in the church. No doubt the whole machinery of church existence in Christ is impregnated in and instrumentalised by the Spirit, but is there also a specific activity of the Holy Spirit in the church as well?

2. *The Church as the Spirit-filled Community*

THE alternative (or complementary) approach to the church as the Spirit-filled community can also make its appeal to the New Testament. Though some would point to the call of the first disciples, most would agree that the day of Pentecost was the birthday of the church. As presented particularly by the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles and 1 Corinthians, the life of the church was charged with unusual phenomena like speaking with tongues, prophecy, supernatural reading of men's minds, gifts of healing and even sudden retributive deaths. There is an atmosphere of ardour which represents the positive side of John Mackay's contrast. If the theory, widely current at the beginning of the century, that the charismatics formed the only order of ministry in the first decades of the church is unproved, the account of the call of the Seven in Acts and some of the less spectacular *charismata* listed in 1 Corinthians indicate that there was no felt discontinuity between the more routine chores of the church and the action of the Holy Spirit. Yet the difficulties contingent upon this situation are clearly indicated in 1 Corinthians. Here the charismatic element in the life of the church led to near chaos in public worship and brought the local

church almost to the point of schism. Particular spiritual gifts seem to have received special emphasis as evidence for the possession of the Spirit and St. Paul finds it necessary to define love displayed in humdrum daily duties and attitudes as the supreme or most abiding gift of the Spirit. The spirituality of this aspect of the church could be described as appropriation rather than incorporation. Clearly the emphasis in the life of the church lay on the individual rather than on the body as a whole. We cannot establish the relative density of this type of approach in the New Testament. There is much in the New Testament which is not so consciously pneumatic. Yet there is an element of dynamism in the New Testament which might point to a specific operation of the Holy Spirit. The evidence suggests an important element other than the institutional in the life of the church.

3. Tension in Church History

IDEALLY and in principle there should be no conflict between the church as the body of Christ and the church as the Spirit-filled community, between the institutional and the charismatic in the life of the church. The risen Christ distributes gifts through the Spirit to whom he pleases. The relation between the action of the Holy Spirit and the operation of the risen Christ is close. But in the experience of the church as a 'mixed body' the two aspects have appeared to lead not only to different patterns of spirituality but also to tensions and oscillations in church history. The two aspects have been seen not as convergent supplements but as a tension between two divergent pulls.

In the recurrent tensions within church history the marks of the church as the Spirit-bearing community can take various forms. Montanism, its earliest protest, already contains a complex of these themes. It represented a protest against the increasing institutionalisation of the church in the second century marked by the growing crystallisation of the monarchical episcopate. It is probably no accident that, as the American Methodist church historian Outler pointed out, it was the only heresy exclusively countered by episcopal action though apparently it consolidated its church government in the course of its development. It emphasised ecstatic prophecy as an important criterion, though the institutional church had no difficulty in constructing a prophetic succession of a non-ecstatic character. It had an apocalyptic thrust and spoke of Pepuza as the new Jerusalem and of the new age of the Paraclete which Montanus and his associates believed themselves to be inaugurating. Tertullian in his Montanist period contrasts the lighter discipline of the church of the spirituals with the relaxation of spiritual tempo of the church of the psychics. We find no explicit reference however to speaking with tongues. Probably Donatism, despite its aim of restoring the pure church ought

to be left out of account here. So far as I am aware this is never specifically linked with the Holy Spirit. In the Middle Ages Joachim of Flores repeats the Montanist claim that the new age of the Paraclete has already dawned. The radical Reformation, with its denial of the Christian validity of any close relationship between church and state and its attempt to return behind the Constantinian establishment as well as the medieval church period, rather defines the type of community to which these pressures would lead than adds other marks of the spiritual church.

The evidence studied by Mgr. R. A. Knox in his book *Enthusiasm* is more directly related to movements in which speaking with tongues is a prominent feature. The French Prophets of the Cevennes belong to the period immediately following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes which dealt a traumatic blow to French Protestant hopes and the revival of apocalyptic expectation natural to hard times. Similar phenomena occurred in Jansenism which stood fundamentally for a revival of Augustinian Monergism against the dominant Synergism of the Roman Catholic Church by which the movement was suppressed. The Catholic Apostolic or Irvingite Church featured a revival of apocalyptic expectation accompanied by both prophecy and speaking with tongues though an element of return to the sources was provided by the institution of the Irvingite apostolate. Pentecostalism proper in America was one form of frontier religion in situations where the institutional churches lagged behind the needs of a rapidly moving population. In Scandinavia, England and Latin America Pentecostalism marked the protest against the apparent formalism of the dominant churches. While Methodism was early marked by ecstatic phenomena (though not apparently by speaking with tongues) in the technical sense, and the separation of Primitive from Wesleyan Methodism was largely a protest in favour of the charismatic against the institutional elements in Methodist history, it is not without significance that the founding father of Pentecostalism in Scandinavia was himself a Primitive Methodist minister. A sociologist of religion would claim that Pentecostalism had many of the characteristics of an alienation phenomenon. A more positive approach is that it represents the protest of ardour against order, a reaffirmation of the church as the Spirit-bearing community against more institutional forms of church life.

4. *The Present Situation*

THE most surprising features in the present situation are developments on both sides of the house. Some Pentecostalist bodies have applied for membership of the World Council of Churches and it is reported that in some cases they have taken Anglican bishops in South America

as liturgical advisers. Even more surprising is the development of a charismatic movement in some of the more traditional churches. Two personal experiences of my own may illustrate the point. As a boy in Sheffield I once heard speaking with tongues from the gallery of the church which we attended and the practitioner (whose subsequent history was not altogether to his credit) was escorted from the church by the churchwardens and sidesmen, one of whom was my own father. About fifty years afterwards I was invited to read a paper to the York Theological Society. I had on offer two papers, one a critique of the Death of God movement and the other on speaking with tongues, on which I had happened to have done some recent reading. Since Alan Richardson had recently dealt faithfully with the first topic the second was selected by the society. I expected a dull meeting and had in any case to return to Durham the same night for engagements on the following morning. I was surprised to be vigorously heckled by a group from an Anglican parish in the neighbourhood to whom the practice was seemingly of some value! More recently Roman Catholic literature of a similar type has been recommended to me. This may represent a convergence from within the institutional churches, marking the return in an oscillation from too much stress on the institutional and the beginning of a recapture in however extravagant a form of a more dynamic approach to the church's message and mission. If this is on the right lines then I can only applaud though I neither share nor particularly covet the experiences which they prize so highly. While I certainly cannot exclude the possibility of a specific operation of the Holy Spirit in the church and regard the two concepts of the church as convergent rather than divergent in principle, the criticisms made by St. Paul of the church at Corinth are as relevant to the modern charismatic movement as to the first century situation: the overvaluation of particular spiritual gifts as the criterion of the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit, the danger of juxtaposing order and ardour and the necessary reminders that the operations of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit can never be separated and the abiding primacy of love as the surest test of the action of the Spirit in the church. It seems that both the charismatic and the institutionalist still need the reminder that the Spirit bloweth where he listeth, and not at our bidding but according to his own sovereign will. The claims of neither the charismatic nor the institutionalist are free to neglect his presence in the universe and the inferences to which this leads. Perhaps it is the charismatic and not the institutionalist who is more in need of this reminder.