

PNEUMATOLOGY AND MARIOLOGY: ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXIS IN DIALOGUE

At an annual convention of the Mariological Society of America during the past decade, Alexander Schmemmann, Orthodox theologian and Rector of St. Vladimir's Seminary, made the following statement in the course of reading his paper to us: "Pneumatology and Mariology . . . are . . . connected with one another in a most organic and essential way. The proper study and understanding of one can never be full or even adequate without the other."¹ My introduction to the discussion of our topic in this evening's seminar attempts to explain and explore some of the presuppositions and implications of such a statement by offering a few reflections upon the organic and essential relationship between the theology of the Holy Spirit and the theology of Mary with a view toward considering the impact that it might have upon ecclesiology and the Christian experience today.

To focus our discussion from the outset, let me immediately propose to you as my main thesis: Pneumatology and Mariology meet most meaningfully in ecclesiology. Each one needs the other, and theology as a whole, but particularly that of the Church, suffers if the two are kept separated. Without Pneumatology, Mariology tends to become confined within its own horizon as privilege-centered, losing its center of gravity in the Word of God. Mary cannot be properly related to Christ and his body, the Church, without her Son's Holy Spirit. And so Mariology departs from orthodoxy or the true teaching about her role in salvation history. At the same time, Pneumatology needs Mariology to test the authenticity of the spirits—are they truly from God or are they of man, of false prophets? The mystery of Mary as the true icon of the Spirit, the *Digitus Dei* or "Finger of God" who fashioned her to be the masterpiece of the new creation among the redeemed, provides an inspiring criterion for the genuineness of the spiritualities arising in the contemporary Church. And so, without the contribution of Mariology, Pneumatology can quite readily recede from orthopraxis or right practice of our Christian faith. Pneumatology and Mariology, therefore, might be viewed for purposes of our discussion as orthodoxy and orthopraxis in dialogue. And their fruitful encounter seems to enrich ecclesiology which is less likely to be both orthodox and orthopractic without them.

A critical question which immediately arises to confront my main thesis and its presupposed propositions outlined above would be: why not hold that Pneumatology and Mariology meet most meaningfully in Christology? Both the Holy Spirit and Mary are related to one another in Christ at the Incarnation prior to their relationship in the birth of the Church at Pentecost. Before the valid difficulty posed by such a ques-

¹ Alexander Schmemmann, "Our Lady and the Holy Spirit," *Marian Studies* 23 (1972), 77. This article generally is a fertile source for my reflections shared in the seminar.

tion can be clearly addressed, it is necessary to examine the intimate connection between Pneumatology and ecclesiology.² Only in light of this can we consider the special relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit and its impact upon the theology of the Church as well as upon the practical experience of her members.

According to the tradition of Augustine, especially as it has been developed by Aquinas, the Church is *una mystica persona* or a community of many distinct persons who constitute one mystical person, living in vital unity with yet distinct from Christ and having the Holy Spirit as her principle of unity. As the conciliar Fathers at Vatican II summed up the fertile Trinitarian ecclesiology of the tradition: "Hence, the universal Church is seen to be 'a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.'" ³ Heribert Mühlen proposes that, as the first two primordial mysteries of Christian dogma, the Trinity and Incarnation, are formulated in personal categories, so should the third, the mystery of grace and/or the Church. The Trinity is expressed as three persons in one nature, the Incarnation as two natures in one person, and so the fundamental dogma of redeeming grace or of the Church ought to be communicated in similar terms, namely, the mystery of one person in many persons.

Within the Trinitarian life the Holy Spirit is the "We-Person" mediating the "I-Thou" relationship of the Father and the Son. Based upon the biblical revelation, the Father discloses himself as a primordial "I" ("I am who I am," Exodus 3:14); the Son's self-manifestation is expressed definitively in the "Person-Word," "I," and signifies his unique relationship with the Father as an "I-Thou" interpersonal relationship ("I and the Father are one," John 10:30); when, however, Jesus uses the "Person-word," "we," in an inclusive sense, he is revealing the Spirit along with the Father ("If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" John 14:23). According to the Catholic tradition the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*Filioque*) as from one principle. A speculative theology reflecting upon the developing dogma beholds the Holy Spirit as the one person in two persons, the One whose response of knowing and loving is as the "We-Thou" person, the seal or bond of unity within the Trinity, the perichoresis, circumincession or mutual indwelling of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Father.

The Spirit who unites the persons within the Trinity also unites persons *ad extra*, particularly within the new creation of the Church. In the mystery of Christ's mystical body, the Holy Spirit is one person in the many persons who constitute the members of that unique body. It is

²Cf. Sabbas J. Kilian, "The Holy Spirit in Christ and in Christians," *The American Benedictine Review* XX (March, 1969), 99-121. I am also deeply indebted to the author of this article as an excellent summary of many insights from H. Mühlen's Pneumatological ecclesiology.

³"Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," n. 4, trans. from *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. by A. Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), p. 352.

the same Spirit who truly indwells both Christ and Christians. The Trinitarian "We-Thou" person who unites the Father and the Son without distorting their relational distinctiveness brings us together into union with the triune God in Christ without suppressing our individual personalities. This is the gift of grace which makes us partakers of the one divine nature precisely as we receive the indwelling of the Spirit. "...[T]he whole of Christian antiquity denies that any creature could enter into a direct relation with the Father. It is always through the Son and in the Holy Ghost that we come to be united with him."⁴ The Spirit is the Gift of God in person, the unitive power of Love, the uncreated Grace whence flows the created graces and charisms which are distinct in each Christian. Each baptized person shares in the Spirit's anointing of Christ, which is both a sanctification for the sake of his/her personal good and, at the same time a consecration for the good of the whole Church. The mystery of the Church, then, is more properly a continuation of the Holy Spirit's anointing of Christ than a continuation of the Incarnation which is the mystery of "one person in two natures." As "one person in many persons," the Holy Spirit makes all Christians one in Christ by anointing them to continue his mission of salvation in the Church.

In the birth of the Church at Pentecost and the ongoing mystery of her continuous call into being, the Holy Spirit is precisely to be considered a co-constitutor of the Church with Christ, our risen Lord. The third person of the triune God enters into a relationship with the body of the faithful which is similar to that which the Logos assumes with his human nature. As the Word worked through his humanity after the manner of an "organ of divinity" or vital instrument of our redemption, so does the Spirit of the Kyrios use the social structures of the Church for the building up of Christ's body in love. The sole aim of such hierarchical structures is to serve the purpose of the Spirit by helping bring about Christ's presence in the world and history. In the mystery of the Church, Spirit and structure belong to each other. Without Spirit, structures become deadly obstacles instead of efficacious signs and means of expanding and intensifying the community of life in Christ. Without structures, the consecratory element of the anointing with the Holy Spirit simply cannot be accomplished in all its human dimensions and creatureliness.

As indicated earlier, it is only in light of the intimate connection between Pneumatology and ecclesiology that we can consider the special relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit and its impact upon the theology of the Church as well as upon the practical experience of her members. Mary's vocation to be the virginal *Theotokos* is precisely what relates her uniquely to her Son's Spirit among the redeemed. "Her concrete motherhood of the Word Incarnate with all the graces preceding the Annunciation and subsequent to it in her 'pilgrimage of faith' is

⁴Louis Bouyer, *The Seat of Wisdom* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1965), p. 177.

that which reveals to us most clearly the Spirit of God at work within her."⁵ Mary's virginal conception of Christ may most appropriately be termed a pneumatological conception ("... she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit . . .," Matthew 1:18; "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God," Luke 1:35). It is the unitive action of the Spirit which weds divinity and humanity in the person of the Word within the virginal womb of the *Theotokos*. Apart from any cooperation of the male principle in procreation, the new creation of the Word-made-flesh is completely the work of the Holy Spirit within the woman of faith.

At the moment of the Incarnation the Church is also pneumatologically conceived within Mary's virginal womb. The same Spirit who seals the unity of the persons within the bosom of the Trinity from all eternity, in time is the one divine person who begins to accomplish his special work of uniting human persons within the God-bearer. Our redemption must gradually reach its culmination in the Paschal mystery before the Father and Son send their Pentecostal Spirit and the Church can be born. Although Christ led his entire life under the action of the Spirit, it was not until he himself had been fully glorified by the same Spirit in the Resurrection that Pentecost could take place. And his mother was present in the upper room once again to be overshadowed by her Son's Holy Spirit as at the Annunciation, but this time in company with the first members of his body the Church. She too, like her Son, and through the anointing of his Spirit, had to fulfill her consecrated ministry as mother of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. From her first mission of mediating his Spirit to John the Baptizer at the Visitation through bringing him forth in Bethlehem, offering him back to the Father, listening to the piercing words of Simeon's prophecy, seeking and finding him in the temple, witnessing the sign worked at Cana through her intercession, standing at the foot of the cross, to her prayerful presence at the first Pentecost, Mary was continuously responsive to the Spirit and "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2:19; cf. 2:51). And only in her glorious Assumption was she perfectly united with her risen Son and fully endowed by his Spirit.

The principal theological reason, therefore, why Pneumatology and Mariology meet most meaningfully in ecclesiology instead of Christology is that the soteriological mission of the Redeemer must first be completed before his Spirit can be the one person uniting many persons. Certainly this is not intended to set up a false dichotomy between Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology. Nor is it designed to polarize the Christocentric and ecclesiotypical emphases of contemporary Mariology which are mutually complementary. Mary may be related to Christ only by associating her intimately at the same time with the ecclesial body born of his redemptive work. Likewise, she is the archetype of the Church precisely insofar as her unique relationship with

⁵Frederick M. Jelly, "Mariology and Christian Anthropology: Mary and the Meaning of Redeemed Humanity Today," *CTSA Proceedings* 34 (1979), 216.

Christ is the model or exemplar *par excellence* of the Mystical Body's participation in his redeeming activity. Neither Christ, nor his Spirit, nor his mother are fully revealed to us prior to the Pentecostal constitution of the Church. This mystery manifests the "Whole Christ," head and members of his Body; the Spirit of the risen Lord, the one person making many persons united in Christ and yet preserving their personal distinctiveness; and Mary, the principal member of that Church, in whom the action of her Son's Holy Spirit accomplishes most completely the triune God's loving designs for all the members of the redeemed-redeeming body, the Church. As one theologian has nicely put it:

Consequently, the divine motherhood of Mary as regards her Son, her motherhood of grace in regard to us, and the motherhood of the Church which is a fulfillment of both these, are, one and all, the *Seal par excellence* of the Spirit on the world of man. Nowhere else is so clearly affirmed the conjunction of the creature, precisely as creature, with the Spirit.⁶

It is precisely because the Spirit's unifying activity in the Church is so clearly revealed in Mary that Pneumatology and Mariology meet most meaningfully in ecclesiology and that the theology of Mary can be an inspiring criterion of the theology of the Holy Spirit. As the "We-Person" in the Trinity, uniting the Father and the Son in a bond of eternal and infinite Love, the Spirit makes Mary and us "we-persons" in Christ by anointing us to continue his saving mission. The Spirit who centered Mary's life completely in Christ can do the same in our daily Christian lives if we learn to respond more generously with the spirit of her *fiat*, vocal at Nazareth, silent on Calvary, and again vocalized with the prayer of the new community at Pentecost. Paradoxically the Spirit of the *Kyrios* who indwells Mary so fully is the divine person who not only causes Christian unity but simultaneously inspires Christian diversity. The Spirit of Christ creates persons in community. Only the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit can save us sinful human beings from falling into the extreme traps of rugged individualism and collectivism. Such ideologies as "hands-off" capitalism and Marxist socialism are manifestations of mankind's sinfulness and resistance to the Spirit. Through Mary, the masterpiece of the new creation among the redeemed, the third person of the triune God reveals a very important truth about the mystery of the Church. With Christ the Spirit has constituted one Church with many members: not two churches, one charismatic, the other hierarchical or institutional, which would mean an ecclesiological individualism in which members are "inspired" to do their own thing; nor does the Spirit of our risen Lord collectivize or suppress the personal talents of individuals and the special spirits of particular traditions in the Church.

Mariology, therefore, the theology of the woman who is entirely for others and whose uniqueness in salvation history is always preserved by the Spirit for our sakes, ought to offer to Pneumatology a clear criterion to judge and overcome the demonic confusion of spirits. In the many

⁶ Bouyer, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

marvellous movements toward liberation taking place in the contemporary world, a certain ambiguity is inevitable because of the fact that several sources of sinfulness are infecting them. One general type of distortion is the tendency and temptation to become utopian in our quest for fuller freedom for more people. This is not to sound a negative note of prophetic doom which immediately suspects every move toward liberation as rebellious against legitimate authority and inspired by a demonic spirit. Rather it is to regard realistically the need to test our sinful spirits regularly in order to conquer the demon within us of secular salvation. This demon rears its ugly head in many sizes and shapes, and not infrequently in the subtle guise of religious garb. The temptation to become self-righteous in the name of religion is particularly dangerous since it is so often accompanied by steadfast, even very sincere, convictions and fanatical commitment to the cause. While the goals are ordinarily good, the means pervert the whole enterprise and the last stage of the poor people to be liberated turns out to be much worse than the first. The answer indeed is not to be cautioned into immobility and indecisiveness—probably the most imprudent course since it leads to sins of which the “good” are so often guilty, the sins of omission. The manifestation of the mystery of Mary must be especially made here because in her we contemplate a beautiful embodiment of eschatological hope. Nothing about this woman of faith, including the precious little explicit in the New Testament revelation, discloses a person who relied upon any created wisdom and power for the ultimate meaning and value of human existence.

The integration of Pneumatology and Mariology within the special setting of ecclesiology may be viewed as orthodoxy and orthopraxis in dialogue. Only through the theology of the Spirit can Mary's role in redemption history be rightly believed and understood (orthodoxy); only through the theology of Mary can we contemplate the effects of the Spirit when one is completely cooperative (orthopraxis); and only through both can we construct a more vibrant ecclesiology for our time.

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