

SEMINAR ON THE TRINITY

I

Under the more specific title of "Pneumatological Ecclesiology: Opening Windows to Other Traditions" Mary Ann Donovan took the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as the point of departure. This creed is normative in two senses: it is accepted by the ancient churches of the East and West, and is pre-Reformation; it is ecumenical in so far as it is used as the basis of discussion among members of the WCC. The God confessed in the creed is revealed in creation which breaks through in fullness at the incarnation of the Son who is made accessible in the communion of the church by the Holy Spirit who is the divine communion.

Some appeal was made to the recent book by J. M. Tillard, *Eglise d'Eglises: L'Ecclesiologie de Communion* (Paris: du Cerf, 1987) who relates communion to the constitution of the church. The church is not a group around the earthly Jesus, but is made known in what is new in the death and resurrection event. The actors are Jesus giving the Spirit received from the Father to the apostles and believers. Three essential elements are: the Spirit, apostolic witness, and communion. At Pentecost the multitudes of every nation were joined in one baptism. The Gospel of God proclaimed in the communion surpasses the destiny of Israel and embraces "the distant peoples" (Is 42:4; 49:2). In the promise made to Israel and revealed at Sinai God linked God's self to a people. At Pentecost the divine offer of salvation passes into its fullness. What comes to birth is the "church of God."

If one wants to summarize the content of salvation, individual and collective, then it is best expressed in the patristic teaching on *koinonia*. The Fathers spoke of the Spirit at Pentecost restoring humanity, but opening communion which is made specific and concrete in the Body of Christ (church) celebrating the Body of Christ (Eucharist). Pentecost stands in that history where Israel kept alive the memory of the universal salvation promised to the whole of humanity, that is, "to the distant nations" of Isaiah. In the Pentecost event, which is constitutive of the church, each nation hears the *magnalia Dei* in its own language. Pentecost is the new voice which claims the memory of Israel and proclaims that salvation is opened up to all humanity through but beyond the people of God. According to Psalm 139 there is no place to which one can flee from the Spirit, either in the heights above or the depths below. The Spirit is anywhere there is bondedness of persons. We already have communion in the Spirit. Now our task is to find ways to express it.

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II

The second session of the seminar was lead by Kilian McDonnell who presented key pneumatological principles which give form and shape to the church. The discussion focused on three issues: the trinitarian character of ecclesiology, Eastern and Western approaches to the role of the Spirit in the church, and the missionary and ecumenical implications of pneumatological ecclesiology.

The trinitarian character of ecclesiology must be maintained whether one's point of departure is Christ or the Spirit. The uniqueness of the person and mission of the Spirit can never be cause for dimming our awareness of the Spirit's unity with the Father and the Word. Christian life images the inner dynamic of the Father who speaks the Word in the breath of the Spirit; our being is caught up within the movement of the Son and the Spirit from the Father and to the Father. Our identity as church, therefore, is properly articulated only in terms of this trinitarian dynamic.

The theological styles of the East and the West affect their understandings of the role of the Spirit in the church.¹ The East tends to focus on the mission of the Spirit and thus its christology is generally dependent upon pneumatology. The Spirit's mission permeates and vivifies the mission of the Son from the beginning. The Spirit is understood as the communion which constitutes and empowers Christ's church from within rather than as a divine help bestowed upon the Pentecostal community.

In the West the opposite approach has usually prevailed. The Spirit has been understood as the agent of the Risen Christ, the one given at Pentecost so that the church might accomplish its task. The Western approach thus stresses ministry rather than communion. The church is both called into being and commissioned by the interdependent missions of the Son and the Spirit. Our understanding of the inner trinitarian relations affects our self-understanding as church.

These insights have significant missionary and ecumenical implications. Many questions were raised by the members of the seminar. Is the presence of a community of believers united in the Spirit to be equated with the presence of the church? Or is the church present only when and where we have apostolic succession rooted in Christ's commissioning of the apostles? How, in other words, are we to recognize the presence of the Spirit of Christ? How is the Triune God made sacramentally present in the church(es)? Is a pneumatologically oriented ecclesiology a *sine qua non* if we are to be the one church of God? We need to learn to express in our lives (and in our theologies) the Christic and particular as well as the Spiritured and universal dimensions of God's care.

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¹See John Zizioulas, "Christ, the Spirit and the Church," in *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir, 1985) 123-42.