

Chapter Five

The Christian Fellowship and the Holy Spirit

Behind the conception of tradition as it lives in the minds of many people today there lies, concealed for the most part rather than expressed, perhaps even unconscious rather than conscious, a concern for the idea (which the New Testament can only sanction) that it is not merely a question of the continuity of the word – the maintenance of the original doctrine – but also of the continuity of a life; that is, life flowing from the Holy Ghost. The fellowship of Jesus lives under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; that is the secret of its life, of its communion and of its power. To use a blunt modern word, the Spirit supplies the “dynamism” of the *Ecclesia*. Word and Spirit are certainly very closely connected; and yet in these pneumatic energies there is something which eludes expression, in words, something in relation to which all words are inadequate, if not in fact quite misleading. There exists even in the New Testament a certain tension between Word and Spirit. “The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.”¹ The apostle Paul freely admits that he won the Corinthians not through words of wisdom, but through demonstrations of the Spirit and of power.²

Here is indicated a reality which can reveal itself apart from words, like that power of the Spirit which struck down Ananias and Sapphira and killed them as though it had been a powerful electric current. Precisely because it is operative and yet not comprehensible in words, or rather, because the words in which we seek to grasp its nature allow the living reality to evade them and in any event do not transmit its power, expressions are used to denote it, even in the New Testament, which do not spring from the realm of logos knowledge but from that of nature, and in particular the notion of power⁽¹⁾. Where this power exists, things happen – things which are described as mysterious, perhaps “occult”, and which a generation to whom all this has become alien through excessive rationalism dismisses with

1. 1 Cor. 4:20.

2. 1 Cor. 2:4.

the derisive term “magical”. We are afraid, and not unreasonably, of this whole kingdom of the para-logical: we know, of course, that from it flow such phenomena as hysteria, mass psychology and psychopathy. On the other hand modern psychology has made us realize that these forces do not lose their efficacy by being repressed in the unconscious, but become only the more dangerously powerful. In any event we ought to face the New Testament witness with sufficient candour to admit that in this “pneuma”, which the *Ecclesia* was conscious of possessing, there lie forces of an extra-rational kind which are mostly lacking among us Christians of today.³

The psychology of the unconscious serves us well in drawing our attention to the fact that, in regard to the dynamism of human life, it is precisely this layer of the soul – only too often withdrawn from clear awareness – which is the decisive factor. Now the Holy Ghost is certainly not to be identified with the unconscious. The Holy Ghost is God: but the *Ecclesia*, in its experience of the Holy Spirit, experienced God as the One whose impact on human life penetrates these depths of the soul, touches these hidden energies, mobilizes and harnesses them in the service of His holy will⁽²⁾. The Holy Ghost seizes the heart, not merely the *nous*: it pierces the heart until it reaches the depths of the unconscious and even the very physical constituents of personality. Theology is not the instrument best adapted to elucidate just *this* aspect of pneumatic manifestations. For theo-logy has to do with the Logos and therefore is only qualified to deal with matters which are in some way logical, not with the dynamic in its a-logical characteristics. Therefore the Holy Ghost has always been more or less the stepchild of theology and the dynamism of the Spirit a bugbear for theologians; on the other hand, theology through its unconscious intellectualism has often proved a significant restrictive influence, stifling the operations of the Holy Ghost, or at least their full creative manifestation. But we shall never rightly understand the essential being of the New Testament *Ecclesia* if we do not take fully into account these paralogical revelations of the Spirit.

If we search the New Testament documents themselves in order to discover some characteristic signs of its mode of being and operating, we shall have to affirm for example that the “pneuma” is there, manifesting its presence and operating in a self-authenticating

3. See note 5.

manner – even so it is said of Jesus that He preached with authority and not as the scribes;⁴ its effects are incomprehensible, striking the beholders with amazement and awe. The Spirit operates with overwhelming, revolutionary, transforming results. It manifests itself in such a way as to leave one wondering why and how, and in such a way as to demolish the walls of partition separating individuals from each other. Its mode of operation is such that we find ourselves forced to adopt the terminology of mysticism on the one hand, of magic on the other, since that of logic and even of theology is seen to be inadequate and inappropriate. In this connection three phenomena in particular fall to be considered, standing obviously in closest relation with the work of the Spirit.

(i) Flowing from the revelation of the Holy Ghost was the mysterious power which made the fellowship, consisting of many separate individuals, into a unity, a single “body”. We must not rationalize this concept of the body – often used, of course, in theological writing – by reducing it to a mere metaphor. Certainly a body in the sense of a physical organism was not meant. But what was intended thereby was an effective reality of a supra-logical kind, quasi-physical, and in any event essentially organic⁽³⁾.

This concept must not be understood either too theologically or too un theologically. It is a question – so much is indisputable – of the body of *Christi* therefore of a spiritual organism which is not independent of the word and the historical fact of Christ; again, however, this must not be understood to mean a reality existing merely in theological-Christological concepts, but rather existing at least after the fashion of the living physical body – not for example (a further rationalization) a reality in the sense of a juristic corporation, or in the sense of an organization. Just as the word “dynamic” is indispensable for the characterization of the “pneuma” and expresses one aspect of its meaning most accurately, so the concept body, organism, expresses another aspect. With this is directly connected the second phenomenon.

(ii) As the differentiation of individual organs is essential to the healthy functioning of a body – there is no body without members – so to the body of the *Ecclesia* belongs its membership. This organism too had a living structure capable of functioning.⁵ There was in the

4. Mark 1:22.

5. 1 Cor. 12.

Ecclesia a regulation of the functions – Scripture declares this explicitly¹ – assigned by the Holy Ghost to the various individual members who were thus equipped to perform their special services – falsely represented as “offices”. For an office belongs to a public organization; an office is part of an institution. The *diakonai*, however, the “services”, should be conceived on the analogy of the organs with their specific functions which inhere in a living body. Even though it be only a metaphor,² this is relatively the most adequate expression of the truth.

The New Testament surprises us again and again by the multiplicity of these functions and their bearers, of the various services and those who render them. One thing is supremely important: that *all* minister, and that nowhere is to be perceived a separation or even merely a distinction made between those who do and those who do not minister, between the active and the passive members of the body, between those who give and those who receive. There exists in the *Ecclesia* a universal duty and right of service, a universal readiness to serve and at the same time the greatest possible differentiation of functions. The metaphor of the organism illuminates one aspect of the reality; the dependence of all kinds of ministration on the one Lord³ reveals the other. The head of a body is something different from the ruler of a people. Yet both sides of the reality are expressed and must obviously be expressed, in order to do justice at one and the same time to the vertical and the horizontal relationship, on the one hand to bring out the mysterious vital fellowship, on the other hand to show that it is the one Spirit who effects the differentiation of functions.

It is therefore quite wrongheaded to describe this pneumatic ordering of the *Ecclesia* as anarchical⁽⁴⁾ simply because it is something different from an organization or institution. This can only be said by one upon whose mind the later juridical administration of the Church has left such an indelible imprint that he can imagine no other sort of order except that. But, it is the mystery of the *Ecclesia* as the fellowship of the Spirit that it has an articulate living order without being legally organized. When we who are so accustomed to the juridical organization of the Church ask how such a “pneumatic”

1. 1 Cor. 12:11.

2. See note 3.

3. 1 Cor. 12:5.

order is possible, the answer must be: it *is* no longer a simple possibility, but it *was* once possible thanks to the reality of whose dynamic power we can now entertain scarcely a vague surmise⁽⁵⁾ – the reality of the Holy Ghost. From this point of view it would have to be said: The organization of the church and in particular its legal administration is a compensatory measure which it becomes necessary to adopt in times and places where the plenitude of the Spirit is lacking. Canon law is a substitute for the Spirit.

(iii) How did the fellowship of Jesus spread? We children of an era that is rationalized through and through always think first and perhaps exclusively in such a matter of what we should call evangelization, or missionary work, in which the stress lies almost wholly upon the proclamation of the Gospel, and this proclamation again is understood in the sense of theological instruction. Of course, teaching and in the broader sense preaching played a decisive part in the spread of the movement. But something at least as important was just that other, that “pneumatic” factor, the non-theological, the purely dynamic. Outsiders were attracted – the story of Pentecost already shows us this quite plainly – not primarily by what was said, but by the element of mystery – what happened simply. The impression made by the life of believers plays a part of decisive importance in the genesis of faith. People draw near to the Christian community because they are irresistibly attracted by its supernatural power. They would like to share in this new dimension of life and power, they enter the zone in which the Spirit operates before they have heard a word about what lies behind it as its ultimate transcendent-immanent cause. There is a sort of fascination which is exercised mostly without any reference to the Word, comparable rather to the attractive force of a magnet or the spread of an infectious disease. Without knowing how it happened, one is already a carrier of the infection.

Certainly, where it is a question of the *Holy* Spirit, it is also necessarily a question of the historical fact of Jesus Christ and the Word of God, for the “pneuma” shows itself to be the Spirit of God in that it testifies to Jesus Christ as the truth and the Son of God. That, however, does not mean that the Holy Spirit cannot for the

most part operate without the Word, by the dynamic energy which is proper to it. The propagation of Christianity takes place to a large extent more unconsciously than consciously, more involuntarily than voluntarily, and therefore silently rather than by speech. As certainly as the explicit word and clear recognition are required for the decisive act of faith and conversion, so the obscure beginnings of faith may be, and often are, much less dependent than we theologians are inclined to admit upon the word of the preacher. Here the mighty energies of the Spirit are more important than any word, although these energies, in so far as they are those of the Holy Spirit, owe their origin to the Word of God. Present-day evangelists and missionaries usually realize this fact far better than we theologians who not only undervalue the dynamic power of the Holy Ghost, but often know simply nothing of it. With them the not unreasonable fear of an excess of enthusiasm, of the para-logical, has certainly had the effect of causing the apostle's injunction "Quench not the Spirit"⁴ to be disregarded and of confining attention to his warnings against the overvaluation of this para-logical, dynamic element.

The Word of God is truly and effectively in the Church as the word of the Holy Ghost, implying therefore a unity of "logos" and dynamic energy which lies beyond all comprehension. From this unity, which later ceased to exist or to be understood, flows the hidden life of the primitive community. It forms the secret both of the fellowship and of its moral power; for upon the inspiration of the Holy Ghost rests the *Koinonia*, the communion of men with each other, the fact that they are knit together in an organism which includes both equality and difference, the fundamental equality of all and their mutual subordination each to other. The significant mark and the essential being of this communion consists in the quality of *agape* – the new ethos of the fellowship and its members. It is understandable that a later time, when this original power and unity no longer existed in the same abundance, should seek to find a substitute for what was lacking and to secure the presence of what was fast disappearing. This attempt at security and replacement assumes three different forms: the living Word of God is secured – and at the same time replaced – by theology and dogma; the fellowship is secured – and replaced – by the institution; faith, which proves its reality by love, is secured – and replaced – by a creed and a moral code.

4. 1 Thess.5: 19.

It is so much easier to discuss from an intellectual and theological standpoint the ideas implied in the revealed Word of God and to analyse them conceptually than it is to allow oneself to be transformed at the centre of one's life by the action of the Holy Ghost: and further, theological ideas can be handled and arranged as one desires at any time – not so the Word of God.

It is so much easier to secure the life of the fellowship, its coherence and its indispensable hierarchy by means of solid legal forms, by organization and offices, than it is to allow the life of communion to be continually poured out upon one, to allow oneself to be rooted in it by the action of the Holy Ghost. You can handle and shape as you please such things as law and organization, but you cannot act thus towards the Holy Ghost.

And finally: it is so much easier to assent to a creed, a dogma, a firm body of teaching than it is to believe in such a way that belief is inseparable from love. Above all: one can mould as one will creeds and moral codes, handle them, teach them, learn them, but one cannot thus control that faith which is active in love.

The order intrinsic to the fellowship springing from the Holy Spirit was *diakonia* – service – the same therefore as flowed from true faith and revealed itself in a new relationship to one's brother. But the organized hierarchy presupposing the office had neither the character of brotherly communion nor had it a unity wherein equality was consistent with differentiation – a unity characterized by reciprocal subordination. The delicate structure of the fellowship founded by Jesus, and anchored in the Holy Spirit, could not be replaced by an institutional organization without the whole character of the *Ecclesia* being fundamentally changed: the fellowship of Jesus Christ *became* the church. The apparent similarity between the official organization and the New Testament order of the Spirit shows upon closer inspection that at every point there has taken place a change in essential character. The paradoxical unity of things which everywhere else exist in disparity was no longer present as the decisive factor. Now there was dogma – without the dynamism of the Spirit-filled Word of God. Now there was faith, in the sense of correct, orthodox belief, but separated from love. Now there was a community in the sense of a Church with offices, but no longer the solidarity of reciprocal service. How this, for the most part, scarcely perceptible change came about must be considered in the following chapters.