

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

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ALTHOUGH the doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul is perhaps more widely appreciated than formerly, it may be doubted whether the same can be said of that of the Holy Spirit living and operating in the Church as a whole. Sometimes we are so preoccupied with human failings in the Church's members that we tend to forget the intimate presence in the Church of the Divine Guest whose gifts show her to be an *opus plane divinum*, as Pope Leo XIII called her. We tend to forget that the Church is a theophany, that the 'Trinity in Unity is apparent in the unity of the Church—the Father, as the principle to which we are united, the Son as the milieu in which we are united, the Holy Spirit as the tie by which we are united: and all is one'. (Bossuet: *Lettre sur l'Unité de l'Eglise*.)

Although the early Church was by no means exclusively composed of holy and perfect members, there was in those days, one may think, a more widespread realisation of God's presence in the Church, specially attributed to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. The catechumens were asked if they believed 'in the Holy Spirit who is in the Catholic Church for the Resurrection from the Dead'. For St Hippolytus, the catechumen should 'hasten to the Church, for it is there that the Holy Spirit flourishes'. For St Irenaeus, the Holy Spirit is co-extensive with the Church: 'where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where God's Spirit is, there is the Church and all grace'. And St John Chrysostom, anticipating the teaching of the Vatican Council, saw the continued existence of the Church as a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence: 'If the Spirit were not there, the Church would no longer subsist, but if the Church subsists, it is evident that the Spirit is there.'

What was the foundation of their conviction? Surely our Lord's promise of the Holy Spirit, which was fulfilled at Pentecost and is still being fulfilled now.

In his last discourse our Lord not only revealed the exist-

ence of the Holy Spirit as a divine Person in the Trinity, but also spoke of him as one who would shortly come to the Apostles, to the Church, to remain with it for ever. But his Presence will be active, not passive—in fact it is through his activity in the Church and in the soul that we know that the Holy Spirit is a Person. Being the Spirit of Truth, he will lead the Church ‘into all Truth’. Being the Spirit of the Son, he will recall to the Apostles ‘all that the Son has taught them’. He will teach them the same doctrine as the Son, but will give them a deeper understanding of it. He will not speak ‘of himself’ but will bear witness to the Son, and the Apostles, under his guidance, will do the same. His presence in the Church will be so great a benefit that it is an advantage to the Apostles that our Lord should leave them, for, according to the will of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, will be sent by them both only after our Lord’s return to heaven. His work of revelation, redemption and sanctification will be continued and completed by the Holy Spirit and the Church. The visible mission of the Son will be fulfilled by the visible and invisible missions of the Holy Spirit—not by a merely temporal succession but because the Father sends us the Spirit of the glorified Christ, which Christ himself first received without measure, and which he merited on the cross for the Mystical Body of which he is the Head.

Hence is seen the intimate connection between the Paschal Mystery and that of Pentecost. Mystically born from the Saviour’s side on the cross, the Church became clearly known to the eyes of men at Pentecost. ‘Then it was that the Holy Spirit animated the organism already formed (by Christ), giving to each organ its operation, and to the whole body life, vigour and growth’, as Diekmann has put it. Before Pentecost there were sons of God who had received the indwelling of the Spirit, but then it was that the Holy Spirit gathered them all into one mighty society of the elect, the Church, which was thus fully constituted only on the day of Pentecost. The redemptive work of our Lord’s passion and death was brought to fulfilment at Pentecost. The building up of the Mystical Body by the distribution of graces for various offices is attributed to the glorified Christ (Eph. 4, 8-12) and

to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12, 1-15)—graces of knowledge, graces of miracles, of prophecy, tongues, and various ministries—but one and the same Spirit worketh all these things, dividing to every one according as he will’.

This vivifying principle of the Mystical Body, Pius XII teaches us, dwells ‘whole in the Head, whole in the Body, and whole in each of its members’. He ‘really exists and is operative both in the whole structure and in each one of its parts’. (*Mystici Corporis* 55 & 60.) Not only does the *gratia capitis* unite us to Christ, but also and principally it is the Holy Spirit who performs this function, he who according to St Thomas is the ‘principal and ultimate perfection of the whole Mystical Body’. Not only do we receive the created gifts of grace and the virtues, but, above all, we receive the Holy Spirit himself, the uncreated Gift—*Donum Dei Altissimi*.

The Holy Spirit in his turn forms Christ in us, and unites us to Christ our Head so that ‘with him we form one Mystical Person’ (*Mystici Corporis* 67). He continues, in an analogous way in the Church, his proper role within the Trinity. Proceeding from the love of the Father and the Son for each other, he is, as it were, the term of their activity. As uncreated love, he is the link that unites them, so that he is called *Nexus* and *Amor*. (cf. I, 37, 1, ad 3.) For St Augustine, ‘the union (*societas*) of the unity of the Church is as it were the proper work of the Holy Spirit . . . because the Holy Spirit himself is the union of the Father and the Son . . . for being the Spirit of both, he is held in common by each’.

So close, indeed, is his union with the Church that the Holy Spirit was called—analogically of course—the ‘soul of the Church’ by several of the Fathers, and the term has been recalled by Leo XIII. The Holy Spirit, being infinite and uncreated, cannot enter into composition with any created being; he cannot therefore be properly a formal cause, a component element that is modified and limited by the matter which it informs. But he is the perpetual principle of the Church’s life, growth and activity in the supernatural order in a transcendent way that is without any exact equivalent in the created universe. How, then, is he in the Church?

St Basil, in a difficult passage of *De Spiritu Sancto* (ch. 26), compares his presence to that of a Platonic idea, and, through his gifts, to that of the whole in the parts. But St Augustine is more explicit and precise. Making use of the Platonist teaching that the soul is life, he teaches: 'the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ which is the Church what the soul is to the human body: the Holy Spirit accomplishes (*agit*) in the whole Church what our soul accomplishes in all the members of one body . . . it enlivens all the members, it sees through the eyes, hears through the ears, speaks through the tongue . . . it is present to all the members at once, it gives life to them all, and their functions to each. . . . Their offices are different, but their life is common to all. So also in the Church of God (the Spirit) works miracles in some saints, in others he speaks truth, in others he preserves conjugal fidelity . . . each accomplishes his own work, but they all live in the same way.' There is then, he continues, 'one body and one spirit (Eph. 4, 4); by the human spirit or soul I command the members to move . . . the tongue to speak, the hands to work, the feet to walk. The members are different, but one spirit contains them all. Many things are commanded, many things are accomplished, but one commands and one is served. . . . The one body lives by the one spirit, and individual members that are cut off from the Church no longer live.'

St Augustine writes again: 'The faithful must belong to the Body of Christ if they wish to live by the Spirit of Christ—for only the Body of Christ lives by the Spirit of Christ. . . . If anyone is not a member of Christ, he does not live by his Spirit.'

Thus the Holy Spirit is the principle of the Church's supernatural life and action. Principle of the variety of states of life and different offices in the Church's organisation, and of different types of holiness, the Holy Spirit is also the principle of unity. First, and fundamentally, because he unites us to Christ, secondly because he is the common source of all good actions, and thirdly as the principle of exterior unity round the Vicar of Christ, which is seen to be the manifestation of the divine presence in the Church, and the fulfilment of our Lord's prayer 'that they all may be one'.

The Spirit of unity is also the Spirit of holiness. The Church is holy principally because the Holy Spirit dwells and operates within her. Her holiness is not constituted by the holiness of her members but by the Holy Spirit. The holiness of the saints, as they themselves recognised, was derived from that of the Church and was its effect and manifestation. They alone, in the most complete way, belonged entirely to the Church: they and all of us receive the Holy Spirit only through and in the Church, especially by the Sacraments.

The Spirit of unity and holiness is the Spirit of truth too. His teaching function was emphasised by our Lord at the Last Supper. It is thanks to his presence that the Church's teaching is infallible, whether expressed through the councils with the Pope at their head; through the Pope alone defining, for example, the dogma of the Assumption; or through the ordinary *Magisterium* of the Church. At the Council of Jerusalem, and before, the Apostles taught with divine authority: 'it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us'—and thanks to the guidance of the Spirit, the Church has kept inviolate the deposit of faith and interpreted it infallibly. These characteristics are not only of the past, but of the present and the future as well. 'The Holy Spirit who guided the Apostles is the same who still guides the Church, and speaks by the voice of the modern Popes. The path to which it commits us is the only safe one. To follow it is neither naïveté nor syncretism nor liberalism: it is simply Catholicism' (P. de Lubac: *Catholicism*, p. 156).

In their efforts to make clear the intimate nature of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, some Fathers call him, as we have seen, the Soul of the Church. Certain theologians, seeing the Church, like Bossuet did, as 'Jesus poured forth and communicated', call the Holy Spirit the Personality of the Church, i.e. the subsisting principle which exercises in the Mystical Body a role analogous to that of the divine person of the Word in the humanity of Christ.

So the Church is the type and model of the individual soul, but here also the parallel is not complete, for an individual who falls into mortal sin loses the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit, while the Spirit's union with the

Church is indefectible and indissoluble. Although these comparisons are helpful as far as they go, Pius XII reminds us that 'we are dealing with a hidden mystery which during our exile on earth can never be completely unveiled.'

The most important principle of continuity in the Church is the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. He makes the Church of today one and the same with the Church of Pentecost. On that day he manifested his presence by the parted tongues of fire, the rushing wind and the gift of tongues. His coming took place in broad daylight in the capital of the Holy Land in a way that was manifest to the representatives of so many nations.

But although certain of the more spectacular charismata, given with unprecedented abundance in the early Church, have passed away, others still remain, as does the 'more excellent way' of charity, which also 'was diffused in our hearts through the Holy Spirit'. And the Church of today 'because of her wonderful propagation, her outstanding sanctity and inexhaustible fecundity in all good, her Catholic unity and unconquered stability is a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an unshakable testimony to her divine mission'. (Vatican Council.)

The organisation of the Church also still remains recognisably the same as at Pentecost, in spite of the modifications of the history of 1,900 years. It is no coincidence that the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, which show so evidently the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church, are also all-important for the Primacy of St Peter. The juridical and spiritual elements in the Church, so far from being incompatible, 'are complementary and perfect each other, like body and soul in us, both having their origin in one and the same Saviour, who not only said "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" but also "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you" and again "He that heareth you, heareth me".'

Essentially visible and essentially spiritual, the Church shows forth both these elements now as at Pentecost, the feast of the Spirit in the Bride. Hence the Mystery of Christ's Church may be epitomised by connecting a text of St Irenaeus with one of St Ambrose:

Ubi Spiritus ibi Ecclesia: ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia.