

## 'I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT'

The Holy Spirit is not a theme with which the modern world would be very familiar or greatly concerned. And yet there is hardly another theme, which, properly interpreted, could be more relevant to a world torn by strife, weighed down with worry, driven to bestiality by boredom, finding neither meaning nor purpose in life, choosing to be content with pleasure instead of joy, burdened with mass loneliness instead of genuine community, and with burning passion instead of creative love.

The heavens are closed up for modern man despite his bold and adventurous incursions into space and its mysteries. He has 'come of age' only to find himself in a wilderness where only the cold howling wind of meaninglessness and not the welcome roar of the Pentecostal spirit is felt or heard. If God is no more, why speak of the Holy Spirit?

To confess 'I believe in the Holy Spirit' in an age like ours would be audacious if we really meant it. But can one say 'I believe in the Holy Spirit' and not say in the next breath 'I believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church?' Is the Holy Spirit some *geistliche* reality that has no visible concrete expression in this sinful world?

The discussion on the Holy Spirit thus becomes doubly

relevant and yet doubly difficult to communicate with the modern world, especially when it is directly connected with the Church whose relevance and effectiveness in our time the world can no longer take for granted.

On the European continent especially, and in those theological circles in the world moulded by Swiss or German Protestant theological thought, there exists twin danger. On the one hand, by its over-emphasis on Christo-monism, continental theology does inadequate justice to the mystery of the Trinity. On the other, by its reluctance to take the historical manifestation of the Church seriously, it tends to over-spiritualize the Gospel. Both these are in a sense 'sins against the Holy Spirit'.

We say in the Nicene Creed that we believe in the Holy Spirit. We need to ask, first, what do we mean by the word 'believe'? Then we should seek to understand, on the basis of the Scriptures, who the Holy Spirit is and what He does.

### 'I BELIEVE'

When the uninstructed, often illiterate, ordinary Christian confessed in the 4th century 'I believe, in the Father Almighty . . . in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit', what did he mean by the word 'believe'? Was he acknowledging an intellectual or theoretical conception of the three persons of the Holy Trinity?

It seems more meaningful if we assume that what the Church confessed through the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol was something deeper than a few theological

conceptions. 'I believe *in* . . . ' That is indeed a strange way of speaking, rather unknown to Greek literature. You could believe the word (*pisteuein tōi logōi*) of somebody, or even believe the truth (*tais aletheiais*); but it is the New Testament which introduces the expression *pisteuein eis auton*—to believe *in* Him. This use of the word 'believe' followed by the preposition 'in' or 'unto', though occurring in the Synoptics, in Acts, in Pauline and Petrine epistles, is predominantly of Johannine usage. The particular combination of the verb and preposition occurs once in Matthew, once in a doubtful reading in Mark, three times in Acts, not at all in Luke, Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians, the pastoral epistles or Hebrews and only once each in Romans, Galatians, Philippians and 1 Peter; but 34 times in the 4th Gospel.

The phrase which the Council of Nicaea thus chose for expressing its faith over against the Arians was essentially Johannine and has to be understood in that context. It is an impressive fact that St. John, unlike St. Paul, does not use the noun 'pistis'—faith. For the Johannine writing 'to believe' is primarily an act of abiding, an act of finding a foundation for one's existence, a reality to which one traces the origin, sustenance and destiny of one's being, rather than a conceptual act of the mind or even a conviction. A classical Old Testament example of this understanding of 'belief' occurs in Ps. 78:22:

For they did not remain trusting in God  
Nor depended on His saving work.

It was the anxiety and restlessness that characterized the people of Israel in their wilderness wandering which drew forth this remark from the Psalmist. They were

afraid they were going to perish in the wilderness for lack of food; and all their idolatry and rebellion and strife can be attributed to this basic lack of trust.

To believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is thus not to have a Trinitarian doctrine, but to have the assurance of the power, the wisdom and the love of God in which one could live one's life in quiet joy and peace.

Another classical Old Testament use of this word *aman*—to believe—occurs in Isaiah 28:16.

Therefore thus the word of the Lord Yahveh

'Behold, I lay in Sion a stone, a stone tested and refined, a corner stone, priceless, a foundation of foundation He who stays (believes) on it, shall not rush'.

Here we are given the promise of a 'sure foundation' on which we can stay. The bottomless abyss of non-being need not drive us to panic and restlessness. Here is a place to stand, in the heart of this abyss of existence towards death, which we call life.

If this meaning of 'believe' (*pisteuō*) is primary in its use in the creed then we would understand the whole meaning of 'confession' or 'Creed' (*pistis*) differently. The root-meaning of *aman* (to believe) is to confirm, support or nourish, and the *hiphil* of the root, i.e. *heemin* means primarily, to find confirmation, to find support, to find nourishment, to stand firm, to be established. See especially the rather surprising use of this verb in Job 39:24, where the unbelief of the war-horse is its inability to stand still at the sound of the trumpet.

Let us make this clear. It is true that the qualifying clauses of the creed do have reference to contemporary heresies like Arianism prevailing at the time. But the basic affirmations, i.e., I believe in the Father Almighty, I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, all refer to a declaration about the foundations of one's own existence. It is not that I declare to the world that these three persons of the Trinity and the Church *exist*. But I am confessing in humble penitence, recalling to myself and the community (the unbaptized are sent out before the creed is said) the foundation of my own existence as well as of the existence of the local congregation. We exist in the Holy Trinity and in the Church. Our confession of the Holy Spirit should be seen as an integral aspect of this basic affirmation about the foundation, source of nourishment and sustenance, and the final goal of our existence.

We need now to consider briefly who the Spirit is and what He does. I would like to present this material under three heads: (1) *Spiritus Creator*, (2) The Spirit of *koinonia* in the Body of Christ and (3) The Spirit as giver of gifts. If we need short-hand for remembering this classification we could use the words Creation, Church and Individual. These are not three separate realms of the Spirit's action, but three modes of His energy, all three of which should be operating in Christians.

#### SPIRITUS CREATOR

In the beginning the Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos, to infuse energy and order into it, bringing

out the creation which was good (Genesis 1:1). Man became a living soul, when the Creator blew his breath (*ruach*—spirit) into his nostrils. The Spirit is not a new-comer at Pentecost. He was in the creation from the beginning. Not only in the creation of man, but long before, when the universe first came to be, the Spirit was there, creating, along with the Father and the Logos.

God's work in the universe is not arranged on the patterns of a modern business establishment, with its neat compartmentalization and division of labour. It is not the case in the Trinity that the father is Creator, the Son is Redeemer and the Spirit is Sanctifier and Perfector. God the Holy Trinity works together in all things.

The Creation itself is an act of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When God the Father spoke the word of Creation, the Spirit was proceeding from Him to indwell and energize that Creation.

And He continues to indwell and energize the creation until now. Both the Logos and the Spirit are immanent in Creation, giving it order and movement, though both remain transcendent in their Triune existence.

Especially in the creation of Man, which is a special event in the creation of the Universe, the Spirit and the Word are with the Father (Job 33:4, Ps. 104:30). The Word was 'the true light enlightening everyone coming into the world' (Jn. 1:9). But the life and the light are not two different things. Understanding or knowing is

a faculty of life itself. As Elihu the friend of Job put it:

It is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty that makes him understand ;

It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged that understand rightness (Job 32:8).

In other words, the evolutionary processes of creation (organic and inorganic) as well as the cognitive processes are activities of the Logos and the Spirit, and these extend not only to non-Christians, but even to the animal and inorganic realms. The Spirit of understanding, wisdom and judgment is given to all mankind, not only to the Church. Science, Law, History, and Technology are equally realms of the work of the Logos and the Holy Spirit.

Especially the human conscience, where both moral discernment and judgment on ultimate issues reside, is the seat and realm of the Holy Spirit in all men.

The Spirit guides the processes of biological evolution, but also operates in men making their historical decisions. History is a continuation of the total time-process. The lowest levels of this process are laws governing mathematics, physics, and chemistry. On the next higher level, though not discontinuous with the lower level, is biology or the laws of life. Higher still stands the level of human decisions, which relates to what man does with himself and with the world around him. Technology, Sociology, History, Medicine, Law, etc. belong to this realm.

The Spirit operates at all these levels, but the higher

the level the greater the degree of freedom given to that on which the Spirit is acting. The methods of understanding what happens on the lowest levels will be inadequate for the higher; though the higher levels are not totally immune from the laws of the lower levels.

This freedom becomes most clearly expressed in the freedom of the human spirit. Freedom means that the Spirit of God does not act compulsively on the agent. The Spirit of God groans and struggles with the human spirit, seeking to persuade rather than to compel, to illumine than to teach. But the persuasion itself does not necessarily occur through conscious struggles, conscious decisions and conscious actions. The Spirit can work also at the sub-conscious level, influencing motivation in imperceptible ways.

The Creator Spirit wants the human spirit to be a co-creator with him. That calling realizes itself even outside Man-in-the-Church, though never apart from the Church, which participates integrally in all that happens to Man.

#### THE SPIRIT IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

The relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church is dependent on the relationship between the Spirit and Christ, to which we have already alluded. This relationship is primordial and pre-incarnational. Even in the famous Isaiah passage relating to the Servant of Yahweh, we find this association, between Christ and the Spirit:

'Behold my servant, whom I uphold,  
My beloved, in whom my soul delights,



I have put my Spirit upon Him  
 Rightness in the nations he will bring forth'  
 (Isaiah 42: 1).

We see this key verse coming to new meaning at the Baptism of our Lord (Luke 3: 21, 22), when the public ministry of our Lord is inaugurated with the Holy Spirit coming down in bodily form, the Father's voice acknowledging the Son in the terms of Isaiah's prophecy: 'Thou art my Son, my beloved, in thee I delight'. The inauguration of the incarnate ministry of Christ is itself thus a Trinitarian event.

But even before the public ministry begins, we see the Spirit's operation in the Incarnation. The angelic announcement to Zachariah about the forthcoming birth of John the Baptist already declares that even the forerunner of the Messiah is 'to be filled with the Holy Spirit' (Luke 1: 15) from his mother's womb. So much more the conception and birth of Christ is a direct act of the Holy Spirit. When Mary protests at the angelic promise to her of the birth of her son on the ground that she has no husband, the angel responds:

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you  
 The Power of the Most High will overshadow you  
 Thus the one to be born will be called Holy, Son  
 of God' (Luke 1: 35).

The testimonies of Zachariah, Simeon and John the Baptist to Jesus are directly inspired by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1: 67 ff, Luke 2: 26, 27, John 1: 6, 32 ff). It is the Holy Spirit's descending on Christ that attests him as the Lamb of God and as the Messiah (John 1: 32, 33). But the main characteristic of the Son of God on whom

the Spirit descends is that He is the One 'who baptizes with the Holy Spirit'. He is the bearer of the Spirit, and He introduces men into the new life of the Holy Spirit.

In our dangerous Christomonism we tend to overlook the fact that the Spirit was in and with Christ all through His ministry. The Spirit drives Jesus to be tested in the wilderness, soon after His baptism (Mark 1: 12). He returns in the power of the Spirit into Galilee (Luke 4: 14). Even the disciples who were sent out by Christ before Pentecost in teams of two are assured that the 'Spirit of your Father' would speak through them when they are arraigned before kings and authorities. Jesus casts out the evil spirits by 'the Spirit of God' (Mat. 12: 28). Hendrik Berkhof's strictures about a too exclusive Logos Christology at the expense of a 'pneumatic Christology'<sup>1</sup> need to be taken seriously in our time. The Spirit and the Logos are inseparable in the Incarnation. As we shall soon see the relationship between *Kyrios* and *Pneuma* become so integral that it is not always possible to distinguish the two very clearly.

But the blurring of the distinction is a temptation which has already begun to beset us. Even Prof. Berkhof, who has in my opinion written one of the two best existing books on the Holy Spirit, goes too far in establishing the identity between Christ and the Holy Spirit, and in thinking of the *Pneuma* as a *Funktionsbegriff*, i.e. 'that the Spirit is Christ in action'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Richmond, Va., 1964, pp. 19 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26. Berkhof admits that this is not a complete identity; but his formulation of the incomplete identity does inadequate justice to the Church's teaching both on the Trinity and on the economy of the Incarnation.

The relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit is a great deal more complex than can be easily formulated in our functional and modalistic categories. Prof. Käsemann's suggestion that 'in the Spirit the Resurrected One is manifested in his resurrection-power' is true as far as it goes. But it does not deal adequately with Ascension and Pentecost, or even with the continuing presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church.

The Resurrection of Christ did not immediately bring in the pouring out of the Spirit. In Matthew and Mark the commissioning of the disciples to preach the Gospel and to baptize occurs before Pentecost. In Luke, however, the bewildered Apostles in post-crucifixion gloom mistake the risen Lord to be a Spirit, and Jesus corrects them by drawing attention to his hands and feet:

'Handle me, and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.'

He is not even The Spirit. That identification can occur only in a tradition which has a very meagre ecclesiology. In Luke, the risen Lord commands the disciples to stay in the city and wait for the promise of the Father (Luke 24:48). The Resurrection does not automatically mean the presence of the Spirit.

It is the same in the fourth Gospel, though the picture there is even more complex. The risen Lord speaks to Mary Magdalene; she clings to him in desperate joy, only to be told that His ascension to the Father is what will make it possible for her truly to cling to her Saviour (Jn. 20:17).

But on the same evening the risen Lord gives the Spirit and the power of forgiving sins to the disciples (Jn. 19: 22-23). Even here the risen Lord is not identified with the Spirit. He is the breather of the Spirit—the Spirator of the Spirit, but not the Spirit Himself. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, but not Christ Himself.

This relationship cannot be clarified without considering the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church. It is to be kept in mind that salvation is life, new life. This new life is the Spirit. The Church is the part of humanity wherein the Spirit as new life is manifestly present.

The things which characterize the life of the Church are first the two great mysteries of Baptism and the Eucharistic rhythm of prayer and worship and second the life of the Church which is the basis for its mission.

In Baptism man is initiated into the community of the Spirit, the Body of Christ. He becomes a member of the Body of Christ; his life is the life of that Body, i.e. the Holy Spirit. Baptism and 'confirmation' cannot of course be separated. To be baptized is to be introduced into the Body of Christ, where the Holy Spirit dwells permanently. But Baptism should not be taken as a sacrament, which bestows an indelible character and confers a special 'grace'. Baptism has meaning in terms of that into which it is an initiation.

Baptism is like being admitted as an immigrant into a new country. Unless we continue to eat and work and learn we do not become a citizen of the new country by the simple fact of our being admitted there. And yet without that introduction into the soil of the new

country, one can do very little to become a citizen of that country.

Baptism introduces us into the Body of Christ where the Holy Spirit dwells. But we must continue to breathe the air and eat the food, and learn and labour in order to be alive in the life of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist and prayer (which form one single whole) is the way of life in the Body of Christ. The Spirit is the spirit of the Eucharist, and of prayer. And of *Agape* (Rom. 5:5). That is just as important. One cannot live in the Body of Christ and have access to the Eucharist, or exercise the gift of prayer, if love is blocked by selfishness, bitterness, guilt or moral torpor.

This is the common life of the Spirit in the Body of Christ—Eucharistic worship and outflowing agape. These are both gifts of the Spirit to the Church, gifts which are above all gifts, and without which other gifts are nothing (1 Cor. 13).

To participate in the life of the Spirit means first to have access in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father in the Eucharist and in prayer, and secondly to live the life of forgiveness, grace and love, of joyous service to the needs of fellowmen. This is what it means to be a Christian. These are the most superior charismata in the Body of Christ, given to the whole community and therefore to every member.

#### SPECIAL AND PERSONAL CHARISMATA

Some British theologians have recently questioned the validity of the *Epiclesis* (invocation of the Holy Spirit) in the Eucharist on the ground that since the Holy

Spirit is the permanently abiding Spirit of the Body of Christ, there is no point in asking Him to come from outside that Body into the Church. This argument is based on several misunderstandings.

First it fails to make the distinction between presence and operation. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ does not mean that all the operations of the Spirit go on automatically. The church prays for special operations of the Spirit in all the mysteries of the Church—in Baptism, Chrismation, the Eucharist, Ordination, Marriage and so on.

Secondly the distinction has to be made between the general operation of the Spirit which is common to all members of the Church, and the special charismata which are differently distributed to various members, all for the common good. The common or general operation lies in the access of the whole community to the presence of God, and the common experience of love that binds the community together

It is a common misunderstanding of the operation of the Spirit in the individual to think of it mainly in terms of setting up a circuit between our heart and the Bible. The Spirit's work is rather to give different gifts to different people, so that each contributes in his distinctive way to enrich the whole. The gifts of utterance or teaching need not be given to all in the same way; but when it is given to one person in a special way, he has no right to take advantage of it for himself. It must be placed entirely at the service of the whole Body. This insistence that the gifts of the Spirit are not for individual enjoyment, but rather for the welfare of the whole,

has not yet permeated either the clergy or the laity in the Church.

What has been briefly stated here has consequences for the life of the Church today.

First the hiatus between the work of the Spirit outside the Church and inside should be healed. The Church has to become sensitive to the work of the Spirit in art, science, technology, music, literature, politics and economics, in the life of both secular man and in adherents of other religions.

Secondly we must rid ourselves as theologians of our Christomonism and reinstate an essentially Trinitarian approach to the whole of Christian thought, taking fully into account the work of the Spirit in the life of the Church, in its worship and sacraments, as well as in its service. This means recovering a new sense of our union with Jesus Christ the God-man by the Spirit in the Church—not just standing face to face with him in faith. Life in the Body of Christ by the Spirit is a much too neglected theme in contemporary theology.

Thirdly it means that Christians, both clerical and lay, have to develop a new sense of their belonging to a community, and experience the fact that the infinite resources of the Spirit are available to each Christian when his life is dedicated to the service of God and to the life of Christ's Church committed to the service and salvation of mankind.