

## Comment

Whitsun seems the appropriate time for thinking about the coming of the Holy Spirit. From the perspective of Pentecost the meaning of the life and death of Jesus is to be found in the life of the Spirit in us. Any future church historian will have to record as one of the major tendencies of mid-twentieth century Christianity an immense revival in awareness of and interest in the Holy Spirit, but for the most part this revival has centred on 'experiences' of the Spirit. Such experiences form, of course, the foundation of the Pentecostal Movement in all its forms. The coming of the Spirit is here seen as something special, something not necessarily granted to all Christians. Simon Tugwell, in an article we shall be publishing shortly, argues that there is, in fact, no such thing as a distinct 'Pentecostal' experience, though recognising, with St Thomas, the intervention of the Spirit in privileged moments of the Christian life, moments of *innovatio*. Neither he nor St Thomas would, however, dream of denying that the Spirit is the basis of the whole Christian life, humdrum or heroic or both, and it is this primary sense of the coming of the Spirit that we need to think about now.

What is first of all being said by Whit Sunday is that to become a Christian is to become divine—and this says something about divinity as well as something about Christians. We are celebrating the fact that what we receive from the Father in Christ is not just some created gift, some modification or improvement in our created nature, but the uncreated Spirit himself; it is by this Spirit that we now live; it is in these lives that God himself is to be encountered. As St Thomas puts it: it is *through* grace that we receive but the gift is the Spirit himself.

It seems clear that it is this gift that John is referring to when he has Jesus saying to the Father: 'The glory which thou hast given me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me'. The first meaning of life in the Spirit is a certain kind of unity amongst believers, the same unity, unity in the Spirit, that is to be found between Jesus and the Father, and it is in this unity that is to make the Spirit visible.

It is in no sense to deny that charismatic gifts and experiences in prayer may be visible manifestation of the Spirit if we insist that the first concrete visibility of the Spirit is in the unity of Christians: 'that they may become one so that the world may know'. This is no more than St Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians; he grants the importance of the minorities in the Church who will be prophets, healers, miracle-

workers or will speak with tongues, but the 'more excellent way' is the unity in love that must characterise all Christians, without which all the other signs of the Spirit are so much empty noise.

We should notice that in Luke's way of seeing the coming of the Spirit the pentecostal miracle is not *glossolalia*, an individual gift for speaking in strange tongues which may not be understood; on the contrary it is the restoration of communication; those who hitherto (since Babel) have been unable to comprehend each other's speech are now able to communicate.

It is because the presence of the Spirit is first evident in this unity that there can be no real division, still less an opposition, for Christians between the spiritual and the political. Whether they know it or not and whether they like it or not (and frequently it has the most terrible consequences), the solidarity of Christians in the Spirit means that they are maladjusted to the society in which they live, to 'the world'. Until the end of history (or the end of pre-history) the kind of social bonds that men have developed are other than and at crucial points (the adjective is deliberate) incompatible with the solidarity in the Spirit that faith establishes. Solidarity in the Spirit means solidarity with the deprived, the oppressed—not simply acting *for* them but being identified with them, it is, as Matthew says, to *be* the poor in the Spirit. It is not necessary to see our society as totally corrupt; the very fact that it is an inadequate expression of real human unity in love means that it will from time to time be threatened in its foundations by actual love; and its typical reaction can be seen in the torture chambers of Brazil, the 'psychiatric hospitals' of Russia and wherever (including the United Kingdom) a ruling class is defending itself against the subversive power of the Spirit.

In this issue the first two articles seek to spell out explicitly, first in the case of Jesus himself then in the much less familiar case of the Medieval Church (ordinarily misjudged as simply a defender of the *status quo*) how the Christian movement in the past has challenged the accepted structures of the day. The Church, which today is so clearly recognised by the ruling groups of so many countries, especially in the Third World, as the principle agent of social unrest is no new phenomenon. It is not a matter of trendy clergymen desperately seeking to be 'relevant', it is simply the Church of Pentecost manifesting the Spirit 'so that the world may know'.

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