

‘Also the Holy Ghost’: some reflections on pneumatology in Anglican Missiology

Also the Holy Ghost: the Comforter. That is the rather dismissive way in which the Third Person of the Trinity appears in the *Te Deum*, one of the staple ingredients of the daily office in the Book of Common Prayer. The BCP also prints the doxology at the end of the psalms in the form ‘Glory to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost’ – the place of the caesura does rather give the impression that the Spirit is a bit of an afterthought. In fact, while classical Anglicanism is impeccably orthodox in the Trinitarian balance of its formularies, there is a clear lack of focus on the Spirit, in liturgy, theology and missiology. This is not really surprising given the emergence of the Anglican tradition from late medieval Western Christendom, where pneumatology was not a major theme. But nor is the situation invariably better in our own times. Consider, for example, the *Mission Praise* worship song *There is a Redeemer*, popular for its fervent devotion and eminently singable melody. The intense Christological focus of each verse tails off into a residual acknowledgement of pneumatology in the chorus: *Thank you, O my Father, / for giving us your Son, / and leaving your Spirit / till the work on earth is done.* The verb, ‘leaving’, suggests for me a functional, subordinating view of the Spirit, a resource kindly presented by Jesus to the Church to carry on his good work for the time being. An Eastern Christian might see this as the fully worked through logic of the *filioque*.

The two questions I want to address briefly are these, First, does Anglican Catholicism have anything to contribute to counterbalance this pneumatological impoverishment in the life of our communion. And second, what difference would it make in terms of our mission if there were to be a greater emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit?

In answer to the first, certainly Anglo-Catholicism cannot in general claim exemption from the charge of ignoring, or at least downplaying, the Spirit. Listen to the words of this hymn by John Mason Neale, mercifully now hardly ever sung: *Christ is gone up; yet ‘ere He passed / From earth, in Heav’n to reign / He formed one holy Church to last / Till He should come again. // His twelve Apostles first He made / His ministers of grace, / And they their hands on others laid, / To fill in turn their place. // So age by age, and year by year, / His grace was handed on; / And still the holy Church is here, / Although her Lord is gone.* The words are revealing of the supernatural realities which were prominent in Neale’s mind; on the one hand, the Lord, once in earth and now in heaven; on the other hand, the holy Church, governed by apostolic succession. Even the residual pneumatology of *There is a Redeemer* is emptied out here; the only reference to grace is to that mediated by Christ and transmitted by apostolic ministry. Yet there also pointers in Anglican Catholicism to a deeper engagement, or the possibility of a deeper engagement, with the theology of the Spirit. In the first place, Catholic Anglicans have instinctively thought of the communication of the Spirit’s gifts, and the location of the Spirit’s activity, in terms of the sacraments.

The most daring and pugnacious expression of this was in the school of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century liturgical scholars who insisted on the indispensability of confirmation as the sacrament of the Spirit, without which baptism in water was not complete. This position was forcefully expounded by the Cambridge theologian Arthur Mason, in *The Relation of Confirmation to Baptism as taught in Holy Scripture and the Fathers* (1893); in the controversy which this generated, he was in turn supported by the great liturgical scholar Dom Gregory Dix, in *The Theology of Confirmation* (1936). Inevitably, this approach to confirmation was humorously disparaged as ‘the Mason-Dixon line’. While they were subjected to fierce historical and textual criticism by those who maintained the all-sufficiency of baptism in water, Mason and Dix were trying to make theological sense of the reality of confirmation as a sacrament in which Christians were promised and received a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. Speaking as a bishop for whom the invocation over candidates of the prayer for the sevenfold gifts, followed by chrismation as the seal of the Spirit, is repeatedly a hugely powerful moment, I am grateful to them for making the effort.

Catholic Anglicans have also been keen to insist on the sacramental nature of ordination, and to maintain that it is specifically through pneumatological transmission that sacramental character is conveyed. In the case of priests and bishops, they could appeal explicitly to the words of the Ordinal annexed to the BCP. This included the formula: *Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest [or Bishop] in the Church of God*, while earlier in the liturgy the medieval sequence *Veni Creator Spiritus* was sung, in an English translation made by the seventeenth-century Bishop of Durham John Cosin – an uncompromising High Churchman who wrote his version originally for the coronation of King Charles I. In the ‘making of deacons’, however, no pneumatological formula was used, the bishop simply declaring ‘Take thou authority’, and *Veni Creator Spiritus* was not sung. It has been suggested that this was because, in Cranmer’s diaconal proof-text of Acts 6, candidates were expected to be, like Stephen, already ‘full of the Spirit’, so no further infusion was needed. In the *Common Worship* ordination rites, the words for all three orders are *Send down the Holy Spirit on your servant N for the office and work of a X in your Church*, though the *Veni Creator Spiritus* remains optional at the ordination of deacons.

While both confirmation and ordination are in Anglican understanding episcopal acts, a further area where the Anglo-Catholic tradition developed an awareness of pneumatology was the typically presbyteral celebration of the Eucharist. The BCP order for Holy Communion is resolutely Christological, and largely historicising, in formulation: other than in the Creed and in Trinitarian formulae, the only pneumatological reference is the petition in the opening Collect for Purity (itself a private devotion of the priest) for the Spirit’s inspiration to ‘cleansing the thoughts of our hearts’. However, in the eighteenth century, the Non-jurors, who distanced themselves from the main body of the Church of England in a high church direction, experimented with more ‘primitive’ or catholic liturgies. The more advanced group, known as the Usagers, looking to the early Church, developed Eucharistic prayers with an epiclesis, an invocation of the Holy Spirit, first on the congregation and then on the elements: *Send down thine Holy Spirit, the witness of the passion of our Lord Jesus, upon this sacrifice, that he may make this Bread the Body of thy Christ, and this Cup the Blood of thy Christ* (Liturgy of 1718). The Non-jurors continued to exercise an influence on the high church party in the Church of England, and later on the Oxford Movement, and their legacy can be seen in the more evidently catholic of the eucharistic prayers which are available in *Common Worship*, where the Spirit is invoked in epiclesis on bread and wine.

These strands of emphasis on the Spirit evident in Catholic Anglican sacramental practice and theology arise from the heart of the Church of England’s internal life. In addition, though, there are also external patterns of engagement which influence, or could influence, Anglican Catholics into a deeper appreciation of the pneumatological. One is the openness of at least some parts of the Anglo-Catholic tradition to the spirituality and theology of Eastern Orthodoxy. The Non-jurors themselves were involved in the 1720s in an ambitious scheme to reunite themselves with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; although this failed, High Churchmen and Anglo-Catholics have ever since been leaders in a continuing Anglican interest in rapprochement with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Inevitably, these conversations have raised the specific question of the *filioque* clause, and the wider issue of the place of pneumatology within a balanced Trinitarian theology, ecclesiology and missiology. This involves a shift away from an account like that of *There is a Redeemer*, in which the Spirit is subordinated missiologically and temporally to the Son, and in some sense even to the Church, to a recognition of the sovereign activity of the Third Person alongside that of the Second – the ‘two hands of God’ (Irenaeus of Lyons) whose polarity and complementarity together constitute God’s mission and the Church’s life as both institutional and charismatic, ordered and untidy, given once for all and constantly being recreated. There is much in Orthodox pneumatology which speaks deep into Anglican self-understanding, however fruitless formal ecclesial conversations have proven.

A second dimension which could prove renewing for our understanding of the Spirit is the possibility of a deeper engagement with Pentecostal Christians and churches. While there are structured conversations between the Church of England and Pentecostals, Anglo-Catholics have as yet played little part in these. Yet the fact is that, strongly committed as we are to the poorest parts of the inner city, Catholic Anglicans are often carrying out their mission and ministry in the very places where Pentecostal churches are also flourishing, particularly amongst ethnic minority and newly arrived migrant Christian communities. Of course, priests and parishes are often closely involved with such churches on a day-to-day pastoral and practical basis; moreover, many church buildings are either shared with or hired out to Pentecostal groups, and many Christians will to some degree operate on a dual membership basis, participating both in the life of their parish church and in a Pentecostal fellowship. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there has as yet been little theological engagement from a Catholic Anglican perspective with Pentecostal Christianity, and this could be an area where the Woolwich Episcopal Area, and the wider Diocese of Southwark, could make a significant contribution to the wider theological resourcing of the Church. The occasions when I have dipped my episcopal toe into Pentecostal waters suggest to me that there we usually will receive a warm welcome, for many churches have an underlying affection for and affinity towards the Church of England – and we should remember that Pentecostalism, particularly in its African forms, can have a deep appreciation for the use of symbol, ritual, sacred action and sacred vesture which form a natural part of our own way of expressing the faith. Not all is straightforward here: there is a need for discernment – itself a gift of the Spirit – and of course a huge variety within the multi-Christian world that surrounds us; but it might well be that deepening our involvement in this engagement could lead us into a deeper place of the Spirit in our own church context.

Why does all this matter in terms of our mission? I believe that we will never achieve an adequate missiology until we have a theology which gives a rightful place to the person and the agency of the Holy Spirit. That will involve a recognition that the Christological and the pneumatological are equally constitutive of the church and that they remain a tension of complementarity with one another; here applies literally the term which Archbishop Rowan used of the coexistence of traditional parish and fresh expression: a ‘mixed economy’, an *oikonomia*, a pattern of the Triune God’s relating to his world which embraces both the organisational, the assured, that which is shaped by our history and also the charismatic, the unpredictable, that which is shaping our future. A surprisingly good paper on the theology of senior church leadership recently produced by the Church of England expresses this as the challenge to exercise ‘faithful improvisation’.

In terms of missiology, this economy requires sets alongside the view that the Church has received from Jesus the responsibility for a mission in fulfilment of which it is given the Spirit as a resource to help its efforts, the new paradigm that the Spirit is unfolding a mission into which it invites the participation of the Church as the community of people shaped by the story of Jesus. A paradigm shift like that, I believe, sets us free from excessive anxiety about how effective we are being in delivering our mission, as it identifies God the Spirit as the true agent of mission, and reminds us that the *missio Dei* reaches far beyond the visible Church, and involves many other co-agents as well as and alongside ourselves. Our role as Christians is to respond to that *missio Dei* in a distinctive and profiled way as the community which is shaped by the story of Jesus, which is formed by the sacraments, which finds its identity in Christ as his body; and that body needs always to be enlivened and empowered by the Spirit that filled Jesus with grace and power, and that renews the face of the earth. I believe that such a bipolar missiology coheres with the breadth of mission which is set out in the Anglican Communion’s ‘Five Marks of Mission’, and I have tried to show that it also has deep roots in the Catholic Anglican tradition.