

UNFREEDOM, THE HOLY SPIRIT AND DEVELOPMENT: ON BEING CHURCH

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Abstract

This paper argues that the fact that the church appears in the Creed as part of the third article (to do with the Holy Spirit) is crucial in understanding the role of the church in the face of "development" concerns such as poverty, environmental degradation, and HIV/Aids – which Amartya Sen characterises as "unfreedom". To argue that the church is the place where the Spirit is at work implies two important points: 1) The true church is characterised by the work of the Spirit; and that, 2) the work of the Spirit properly understood will draw the church into the concerns of "development". If this is correct, then wherever people confront "unfreedom", there the church of the Spirit is to be found.

Keywords: Church, Development, Holy Spirit

Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The church is the church only when it exists for others ... The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others."² In a world increasingly characterised by poverty, environmental degradation and HIV/Aids "existing for others" must mean more than being willing to allow the "others" to enter our metaphors, to sing and to pray with us.

The Christian faith has answers to the development concerns of our world, the things Amartya Sen calls "unfreedom", but while development thinkers are increasingly finding the truths of these ways, the church has vacillated between underestimating them, and expressing them in terms irrelevant and incomprehensible to others. Already in the 1940s Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote of the need to return to the roots of our Christian faith in order to make its truth comprehensible in the society around us.³

"Theology and Development" operates in the interface between our faith and the world, seeking a deeper understanding that will show the gospel to be relevant to developmental concerns such as poverty, environmental degradation and HIV/Aids, while calling and empowering the church to be the body of Christ, bringing healing, hope and wholeness wherever they find themselves.

What is (the Secular Field of) 'Development'?

What constitutes development is a widely contested issue, but it is increasingly been realised that development is not synonymous with Westernisation, modernisation, improved technology

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² Bonhoeffer 1984:382-383.

³ Bonhoeffer 1984:382.

and infrastructure, and economic growth – and that affluence does not constitute liberation, even where it is achieved, “that the poor cannot be liberated through money.”⁴

Amartya Sen asserts that “to counter the problems that we face, we have to see individual freedom as a social commitment.”⁵ Freedom is both the goal of development and the means by which we attain it.⁶ Freedoms of one kind promote and support freedoms of another kind,⁷ so development is about increasing the real freedoms that people are able to experience and enjoy. Sen identifies several key areas of freedom and “unfreedom” as economic activity, political freedom, social facilities, transparency guarantees and protective security.⁸

Development, “the removal of unfreedoms”, is primarily a value- rather than a financial- or technical-problem.⁹ The critical issues are sustainability and inclusiveness, transformation not growth, justice – not equality of income, equality of opportunity, respect and recognition – not equality of status and power.¹⁰ This calls for a change in our values, particularly with regards to our understanding and use of power, a transformation that will depend on our overcoming the conditioning of our history, culture and institutions. The great religious teachers’ insight into the values of humility, moderation and love, “the integrative values we must now learn to live”, will surely play a part.¹¹

Myers asserts that, “the poor are poor largely because they live in networks of relationships that do not work for their well being.”¹² He says that the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational: Relationships that do not work, are not just, are not for life, are fragmented, dysfunctional or oppressive¹³ and hence the cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritual.¹⁴ Michael Taylor concurs, “Poverty is less about lack of resources than about their unfair distribution. It is the bitter fruit of injustice,” shown in people acting in self-interest in manners that are patronizing, dominating and exploitative.¹⁵

Charity, aid and service are inadequate solutions to the development problems facing our world, in that they alleviate problems without addressing the fundamental causes of those problems. “Philanthropy at best can only be a balm for economic ills and at worst an opiate to postpone economic revolution.”¹⁶ The fundamental causes will only change when the values and the relationships change.

⁴ Taylor 1995:49, quoting the declaration of the 1974 consultation of CICARWS and CCPD in Montreux.

⁵ Sen 1999:xii. We need individual freedom and realism to live as free as possible in an “unfree” world – in Christian theology and jargon we say that even here and even now we can experience the kingdom of God.

⁶ Sen 1999:xii; 3.

⁷ Sen 1999:15, 16. Sen shows much closer links between economic growth and the freedom of the economic climate than the “Lee Thesis” linking of economic growth and political oppression. Indeed, he shows clearly that “unfreedom” of one kind serves both to encourage and strengthen “unfreedoms” of another kind, and to weaken and undermine other areas of freedom. Development must be balanced in addressing all areas of “unfreedom”, and advances in freedom in particular areas need to be seen in the context of losses of freedom in other areas – where such losses exceed the advances “undevelopment” is happening.

⁸ Sen 1999:10. Sen, perhaps as might be expected from a self-confessed atheist, misses or ignores the freedom and power associated with religions and ideologies. Martha Nussbaum (2000:78) develops Sen’s position further explicitly identifying the “central human functional capabilities”: Life, Bodily Health, Bodily integrity, Senses, imagination and thought, Emotions, Practical reason, Affiliation, Relation with Other species, Play and Control over one’s environment.

⁹ Korten 1990:223.

¹⁰ Korten 1990:4.

¹¹ Korten 1990:214.

¹² Myers 1999:12f.

¹³ Myers 1999:86.

¹⁴ Myers 1999:88.

¹⁵ Taylor 1995:87.

¹⁶ Taylor 1995:49.

What is needed, then, are transformed people, transformed people who will in turn transform the world. Myers lists the attitudes necessary of a holistic development practitioner, but it could just as well describe the Holy Spirit working in people.

Be a good listener [love]; Be patient; Be humble before the facts [humility]; Everyone is learning [grace]; Everywhere is holy; Every moment and every action is potentially transforming; Love the people not the program; Love the churches too; Cultivate a repentant spirit; Act like dependent people whose reality counts.¹⁷

David Korten says that what is called for is a:

... new human consciousness in which the more nurturing, enabling and conserving dimensions of female consciousness gain ascendance over the more aggressive, exploitative and competitive dimensions of male consciousness that have so long dominated the social and economic life of human societies.¹⁸

While we might expect this conclusion from a theologian, it is critical to note that Korten is not a theologian. He arrives at this conclusion from his work and experience within the development industry.

Attempting development without changing people's values is ultimately a cul-de-sac of "fishing babies from the river", but we clearly need more than "a prayer for a bag of rice" style of "relief work" when the values that are most profoundly impacting development and most in need of change are in opulent, mostly Western, societies.

What is the Holy and Catholic Church?

Inherent to defining "church" is the assertion that certain things are not "church". I believe that, generally, the Spirit requires of us to do this self-critically, as a guide in our trying to follow Christ faithfully, and a means of evaluating whether we are being true to the fullest sense of what it means to be church. It is not a means of declaring other Christ-followers' understanding of church as invalid, nor the means by which we define ourselves as church to the exclusion of others.

"Church" is at once building, institution, hierarchy, place, service of worship and none of those things. Not everything called "church", or normally done in association with "church" is necessarily church.

According to the established Reformed definition, "The church is where the word is rightly preached, and the sacraments are properly administered."¹⁹ "Rightly" preached must refer to more than technique and style and more than a particular interpretation of what the word means. Similarly proper administration of the sacraments must refer to far more than the form of the liturgy and the technique by which they are administered. The "rightly" preached word must be congruent with the values of God, in accordance with God's Holy Spirit, and in a manner which transforms the lives of people and through them the world. In the same way "properly" administered sacraments must produce actions and attitudes consistent with God's Holy Spirit and God's mission in this world. Understood in this manner, it is in these things that the church experiences the presence of the risen Jesus through the presence, and activity, of his Holy Spirit. This communal experience of God, through those values that characterise the Holy Spirit, points to the creed's qualifiers of "the holy catholic church", "the communion of saints". Consequently it is fair to say that, "anything that builds up the Christian community is a true sign of the presence of the Spirit while anything that breaks down or mars the Christian community is not a sign

¹⁷ Myers 1999:151. My comments are in square brackets.

¹⁸ Korten 1990:4.

¹⁹ Albert van den Heuvel in Rein 1969:69.

of the Spirit."²⁰ It is by the Holy Spirit experienced in, albeit not exclusively in, the Word and Sacrament that the church is defined. This is why the church falls under the Third Article of the Creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit".

Helmut Thielicke asserts that the church does not happen in cathedrals and similar places, simply because they are defined as "religious buildings", but where the word becomes springs of living water. He continues that the glory of the church is the presence of the One who has come into the midst of his people.²¹ The way that God is present with God's people is through God's Holy Spirit. The church, "is an event; an activity ... a way, she happens ... Church is mission – mission is not one of her activities ... the church is not liturgy... We encounter the church only where we observe her missionary service in action."²² "Church" is wherever "church" happens.

"Church" is "where the Holy Spirit is "lived" and "experienced". This is the implication of the fact that the Church is part of the third article of the Apostles' creed. The church is the place where people do, and increasingly strive to do, the values and characteristics of God – those values and characteristics that we experience in Word and Sacrament and by which we recognise the Spirit's presence in our midst. I would suggest, as a working model rather than a definitive list, that those things would necessarily include love, grace, mercy and justice (as the most widely accepted characteristics of the Father), healing, freedom and self-giving, servant-leadership (as principle focuses of the ministry of Jesus) and the familiar fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control [from Galatians 5 v22]).²³ Church is the place and the event that is characterised by the character of God that is described by the Holy Spirit.

The Apostles' Creed's structure reveals an inherent logic and understanding of the Spirit that is helpful to us. It makes no attempt to provide an orthodox theological definition of the Holy Spirit, but instead moves directly from, "I believe in the Holy Spirit" to explaining what that means in terms of human experience (the church, the community of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting). Belief in the Holy Spirit is, according to the creed, rooted in experience rather than theology. It is in experience that we find what it means to believe in the Holy Spirit.

The church has been regarded as holy not because it is composed solely of holy people (saints should be understood not as especially fine people but as those set apart for "holy gifts and works," such as "the saints of Corinth"²⁴), but rather because, "it could make people holy and because in it there resided the grace which could enable all who would come to find salvation."²⁵

The church is holy because the Spirit which creates and defines the church is the very definition of what is holy. Barclay shows the root of holy (*hagios*) as meaning different – not set apart or separated. The church is in the first place different. "The church is different, but the difference is to be expressed not by detachment from the world, but by involvement in the world."²⁶ It is precisely in its interaction with the world that the church is revealed as different. To understand the holiness of the church as "being set apart" or "being morally irreproachable" can be too easily misunderstood as disengagement. Pannenberg stresses that, "the holiness of the

²⁰ Gaybba 1987:268, 270. Gaybba points out that any other supposed signs of the Spirit even the spectacular and extraordinary are ambiguous as signs of the Spirit.

²¹ Thielicke 1968:241.

²² Albert Van Den Heuvel in Rein 1969:70.

²³ The so called "fruits of the Spirit" are given primacy over the so called "gifts of the Spirit" in defining the Spirit because "the fruits" describe the Spirit's essence while the gifts describe some of the possible outworkings of that Spirit.

²⁴ Barth 1949:144.

²⁵ Barclay 1969:303.

²⁶ Barclay 1969:256.

church denotes its bond with God and his cause in the world. [*italics mine*]²⁷ Indeed the church's holiness is shown in engagement with the world because it is here that the church's difference from the Spirit of the world is most obvious.

Catholicity is an inherent characteristic of the church because it speaks of universality. The Holy Spirit, and hence the church, is universally relevant and applicable. There is only one Holy Spirit through which the church belongs to all people, all cultures and all ages and can become embodied in every culture and age.²⁸ It no more belongs to Western culture and theology, than to theologians of 1700 years ago, or any other particular people or time.

Church is identified with Love-Unity and Grace-Freedom ...

The Holy Spirit being "lived" is characterised by love, worked out as unity, and by freedom, worked out as grace. Moltmann describes it as, "a unity in diversity and a diversity in unity. The power of unity is love. The power of diversity is freedom."²⁹ This love-unity binds diverse groups together intertwining their present and their future. The freedom that arises in this atmosphere of love and acceptance liberates them to be themselves, and ensures that each, "through love contributes something to the good of all because, not in spite of, his special gift, calling, and characteristics."³⁰

Together, this freedom, love and unity effect a deep, shalomic and divine peace, the "communion of the saints" which through being experienced draws one into nurturing it. The gracious condition-less love, arising from freedom, allowing and encouraging freedom is the heart of the gospel and the unstoppable power of God to transform the world.

This transformation of people builds the communion of saints and incarnates the Spirit by establishing the characteristics of the Spirit, especially love³¹, within people and through them within the world. It is through the creation of this love within people that they come to see and respond to the pain and injustice of other people,³² and so to further the "establishment of the kingdom". Consequently, "an individual's sanctification is the most important part of her or his contribution to the life of the community."³³ This loving unity ultimately works itself out as freedom. The distinctive characteristics of the Christian community are love freedom, not standards of behaviour.³⁴

As people experience the freedom that comes from being loved and accepted in their relationship with God, self and others, they are drawn to desiring and working for freedom in other areas. The removal of substantial unfreedoms of one type promotes and supports freedom of all types.³⁵ "The linkages between different kinds of freedoms are empirical and causal, rather than constitutive and compositional" – any freedom or any expression of the kingdom is a foothold in the future. Even Amartya Sen, an atheist, says that the world's development problems will be solved through seeing individual freedom as a social commitment.³⁶

²⁷ Pannenberg 1972:156.

²⁸ Tilby 1985:116.

²⁹ Moltmann 1992:194.

³⁰ Quick 1960:307.

³¹ "...love, and not the spectacular, is clearly seen as *the* sign of the Spirit's presence [*Gaybba's italics*]", Gaybba 1987:27 (see also Gaybba 1987:66).

³² Gaybba 1987:204.

³³ Gaybba (1987:223) read not just "Christian" community, but "world" community. This parallels Korten saying the church's most important work is the transformation of individuals, not the handing out of aid.

³⁴ See Taylor 1973:159, 60.

³⁵ Sen shows clearly that the reverse is also true: unfreedom of one kind serves both to encourage and strengthen unfreedoms of another kind, and to weaken and undermine other areas of freedom.

³⁶ Sen 1999:xii.

... the "Communion of Saints"

The communion of saints builds freedom in, around and outside itself until people are so transformed as to become a part of it. It is first experienced in people, not God. Jürgen Moltmann says that it, "is experienced by those who know it as both the love that binds and the freedom which allows everything to arrive at itself, in its own unique nature."³⁷

Moltmann says the Spirit is present as community and is experienced in the community of believers, one with another.³⁸ He describes this "community of saints" as the image of God and the place where God is known and experienced. Unfortunately, this inherent divine power in wholesome community has seldom been recognised (other than as a systematic theological extrapolation). Christian theology has frequently sounded more like "God is distant yet relationship and community, and so, since God is perfect community that is what we should aspire to,"³⁹ rather than extolling the communion of saints as the presence and power of God for life and for the transformation of the world.

This understanding bridges the misunderstandings between those who support the ideas of "justification by faith alone" and those who speak of the necessity of works. Love, unity and the communion of saints are both gifts and tasks: God's gift to us, and the task to make them a living reality in this world and life.⁴⁰ Our actions are important, but the Spirit and our experience of the Spirit precede any merit on our part – indeed it is the experience of the Spirit that draws any form of meritorious actions from within us. It is, of course, at the same time misleading to talk of merit – because the entire communion of saints is based on and soaked in the atmosphere of merit's anathema – grace. One might go as far as to say that the only meritorious acts are acts of grace. Although Gaybba is right in saying that while believer's actions form part of the charismatic element in the church's life even when they are without love, they are at their most valuable when they are actions expressive of love, because, "they can evoke further responses of love from community members towards each other and from God towards the community."⁴¹

Too often the church has misunderstood the Spirit as solely a source of supernatural, super-human power and wisdom (which is not to deny the Spirit as a source of wisdom and power that is quite contrary to that of the world), but misses the point that the Spirit, "works primarily by generating awareness and communion and that whatever power and wisdom he gives derives from that."⁴² This in turn has led to a misunderstanding of the Spirit as a "private possession" rather than an expression of community, and often tempted churches to try to standardize the signs of the Spirit's presence and the conditions of the Spirit's coming in complete contradiction with scripture.⁴³

The Spirit, however, can not be owned. Having the Spirit means living it out, and so Barth says that the life of the church is the fulfilment of service.⁴⁴ Love is more than either gift or fruit of the Spirit, rather in a real sense the Spirit is the love,⁴⁵ "which marks each spiritual gift to be,

³⁷ Moltmann 1992:220.

³⁸ Moltmann 1992:217.

³⁹ See Gaybba (1987:65): "Father and Son wish to give us that which unites them so that we can be similarly united to them and each other This communion is one of love which is broken by lack of love. This love is the special gift of the church to its members."

⁴⁰ See Gaybba 1987:183.

⁴¹ Gaybba 1987:220.

⁴² Taylor 1973:200.

⁴³ Perhaps the understanding of *umoya* within African psychology bridges the two points of view and brings harmony, "umoya is that which a person receives from God and has in common with him [God], the personal, "vital force" which gives a person being and life, strength and power, harmonising one with humanity and with the universe." Anderson 1991:101.

⁴⁴ Barth 1949:146.

⁴⁵ "Love is the very spirit of community itself..." (Quick 1960:283).

not a mark of some special superiority or privileges in its possessor, but a contribution which the individual supplies to the common life of all," and so, "... it makes the results of his special gifts to be common property for the good of all."⁴⁶

The Spirit permeates every aspect of Christian community infusing new power and a new direction, and hence binding the church and the world together through their common eschaton – the kingdom of God. In this people are reborn into what is possible within this life and world, given hope for all of life and all of creation, and enthused to act lovingly. Cynicism, callousness and hopelessness are replaced with faith and hope for this world, not through certainty, but through their present experience extrapolated.⁴⁷

The Church is an Extension of the Incarnation

Christian thought centres on neither doctrine nor abstract truths, but on a living person. Its aim is to show and teach the ability to live, what Anderson calls "the ultimate answer to the African quest for power (i.e. physical well-being, social stability and peace, life itself)" which the Holy Spirit provides.⁴⁸ In our increasingly polarised and hurting world this may well mean the ability to heal, be healed and to cross divides. It is as pertinent to the rich as to the poor, to the development worker as to the (other) hurting, exploited and suffering person.

Hebblethwaite has written that, "Christianity is totally misunderstood if its ethical imperatives are held to stem from the desire to avoid damnation. The Christian hope in as far as it really is Christian, far from distracting us from the present task, inspires and energises just such commitment to make the world a better place."⁴⁹ As long as we understand our faith purely in terms of a life after death, we miss the power of the gospel to provide the inner strength and motivation to live and work for the creation of the kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven."

"The Spirit's presence therefore is meant to result in the transformation not only of individuals but also of their environment. The presence of love should result in the creation of an environment in which people can feel loved and at peace, an environment that reflects that people share in God's Spirit of love, an environment, therefore, that is holy. By sanctifying humanity, the Spirit sanctifies humanity's world."⁵⁰ Despite this, it is a two-way-street in which people's actions, and in particular their choices to live, or not live, according to the values by which the Spirit is experienced, determine the degree to which the Spirit is present in the world.⁵¹ Christians' lives, like their faith, should centre on this world and its improvement, for, as Eduard Schweizer says, "... biblical prophets have put forward very rational political and social solutions when under the influence of the Spirit."⁵²

The church as the place where the Holy Spirit is "lived" and "experienced" is consistent with the another common definition of church as "the body of Christ". "Body of Christ" implies the

⁴⁶ Quick 1960:283.

⁴⁷ Moltmann (1992:97) makes a similar point in speaking of the Spirit as the "eye" to life and the "well of life".

⁴⁸ Anderson 1991:vii.

⁴⁹ Hebblethwaite 1996:206.

⁵⁰ Gaybba 1987:261.

⁵¹ I believe it would be non-sensical to speak of the Spirit's omnipresence given that the ways in which we experience the presence of the Spirit are not universally present, given that we are not making a distinction between "the Spirit itself" and the "way in which it is experienced", and given that "omnipresence" is not an essential characteristic of divinity. Nevertheless, if we were to insist on it, we would speak of the "experience of the Spirit's presence" instead of the "Spirit's presence." Either way, the transformation that the Spirit is meant to result in is directly related to people's actions.

Gaybba (1987:257) says that the old practice of "constantly talking to God presents within one in the middle of one's daily work is extremely important, if one is to create the milieu in which the ordinary becomes a constant experience of the Spirit's presence."

⁵² Kung and Moltmann 1979:xi.

risen "body of Jesus". This means that "the church" is not a memorial to Jesus of Nazareth who once walked the earth, but rather the present experience of Jesus walking the earth, the incarnation of Christ and Christ's Spirit; the ever present experience of the incarnation. Thielicke⁵³ puts it this way: The martyrs throughout history "did not suffer in order to honour the memory of the great Nazarene. They suffered because they were already ahead of the present in which their executioners lived; they heard the steps of the coming one approaching from the other side ...". One might add that this is because, through his Spirit, Christ was alive in them.

As the "body of Christ" and the extension of the incarnation, the church is the means through which the "values of heaven" become reality in this world. Wherever the values of heaven are lived in this world, wherever the Spirit of God is incarnated, there is the church. This is a workable definition of "church" that emphasises a living and experienced reality of God and the "values of heaven".

Striving for a just, holy society is an inherent part of a Christian's striving to be holy. While this will always be understood in terms of practicing, encouraging and broadening that which makes good interpersonal relationships and societal shalom (the values of heaven) Christians striving to be holy will necessarily, ultimately, include incarnating those values in everything from economic and foreign policies to the relationships between countries, races, continents, peoples and nations, wholesome food supplies and supply, and combating dread diseases.

Healing and wholeness will have come to society when all relationships are characterised by the communion of the saints. Society will then be characterised by justice and the all embracing shalom of God. It will be a society consistent with the vision of the prophets, filled with the fruits of the Spirit, established in the teachings of Jesus.

Incarnating the Spirit

Any acts that embody the fruits of the Spirit can rightly be understood as incarnating the Spirit and hence making this world more closely resemble the kingdom of God.⁵⁴ This is a sharing in the mission of God which is "making the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of our God" (Revelation 11:15). Christians should be characterised by such acts, for the Spirit is also the "Spirit of Jesus".

Understanding the centrality of the values of God to the mission of God and so the lives of those who would call themselves disciples of Jesus, enables Christians to evaluate and choose their actions within the world, in a way that is consistent with the values of God, while simultaneously assuring them of the importance of any, and all, of their actions.

Just as the work of the Holy Spirit leads to the establishment of the fruits of the Spirit, so the work of God leads to the establishment of the values of God. Yet the fruits of the Spirit and the values of God are the same things, both leading to shalom, justice and the transformation of the world. This recognition is crucial, because it enables us to see that the values of God are not only what are being established in this world, but also the means by which they are being established.

Our understanding of church has been obscured by the churches' structures and bureaucracy, which have raised administration, adherence to rules and hierarchical authority, above the Spirit in importance. "Perhaps the greatest obstacle to a proper understanding of the church is the absolutization of any of its historical forms or of any particular ecclesiology."⁵⁵ Any model, by

⁵³ Thielicke 1968:240.

⁵⁴ Such a strongly incarnational understanding might also prove useful in helping us to discern more meaningfully the relationship between what is essentially human and what is essentially divine. The popular idea (sometimes attributed to having been inferred from Paul's writings) that godliness is over and against what it means to be human is not universally accepted, nor especially helpful in convincing people to act within their lives and their world. Some Christian anthropological (and soteriological) thought understands godliness as the high point of what it means to be human.

solutization of any of its historical forms or of any particular ecclesiology.”⁵⁵ Any model, by its limits, constrains the underlying catholic essence of the church, and it is only as the church keeps its eyes on Jesus, and the Spirit of Jesus, rather than any particular model, that it can follow closely and faithfully in a process that will necessarily, in a changing world, be a process of constant reform and rebirth. No model can capture the dynamism, and the particularity of a global body incorporating and liberating diverse people through the Spirit of Christ which bonds, drives, and leads them.

The Church is Wherever the Spirit is at Work

Christian faith, even as expressed in the creeds has never truly been in the church so much as it has been an acknowledgment that the church is “the field of the activity of the Spirit of Christ.”⁵⁶

Karl Barth acknowledged that we do not believe in the church, going on to say,⁵⁷ “but we do believe that in this congregation the work of the Holy Spirit becomes an event.” That is precisely the point – the church is the place where the Spirit is lived, the work of the Holy Spirit happens, and where the Spirit’s presence guarantees this (wherever the Spirit is present it is at work transforming people and through them the world).

The church is the place where the Spirit is found, not in a narrow, exclusive manner which naïvely suggests that the Holy Spirit of God is found only in those places that declare themselves church, but in the sense that wherever the Spirit is found that is “church”. Moltmann says that the church, “has no monopoly in the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not tied to the church. The Spirit is not concerned about the church as such. He is concerned with the church, as he is with Israel, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, the rebirth of life and the new creation of all things.”⁵⁸ He argues against the idea that Spirit is “simply and solely” the spirit of the institutional church because, “this would restrict ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’, and make it impossible for the church to communicate its experience of the Spirit to the world.”⁵⁹

Notably, too, the church is found not only where the Spirit is found in all of its fullness and eternity, but also where the Spirit is revered, and worked towards, where it is valued and increasing, where people give of themselves in humility, service, grace and love to establish love-justice, mercy, grace, honesty, kindness – the things of God’s kingdom.

The centrality of the Holy Spirit to the church does not of necessity mean a buying into any particular pneumatology. Instead, it asserts that the real, present experience of the fullness of the Spirit can be consciously enjoyed by every Christian, in a manner as real among communities that do not experience the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit as among those who do. The Holy Spirit is more than a mysterious aspect of the Trinity, it is the daily experience of lives and communities that are changed, healed and given meaning and power, communities that are characterised by the self-giving, justice seeking Spirit of Jesus, the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience kindness, goodness, humility and self-control – it is the experience of church.

Yet quite clearly it is not an experience that is necessarily limited to “steeple, cathedrals and churches”, in truth it can be an experience that is foreign to many “steeple, cathedrals and churches”. The early church was not based in theology, except for the most basic of creeds; the early church judged people by their relationship to the Spirit, the church became a mission church because of the Spirit at work in it.⁶⁰ So when Quick asserts that neither John’s gospel nor the writ-

⁵⁵ Migliore 1991:199.

⁵⁶ Pannenberg 1972:145.

⁵⁷ Barth 1949:143.

⁵⁸ Moltmann 1992:230.

⁵⁹ Moltmann 1992:8.

⁶⁰ Bruton 1967:158.

ings of Paul give any hint to the work of the Holy Spirit outside the church,⁶¹ it is quite possibly an affirmation that wherever the Spirit was at work – there was the church!⁶² In fact, that is where the weight of the evidence seems to lie: “The fact that the apostolic community linked Spirit and church did not mean that it never saw the Spirit as active outside the Christian fold. But it did mean for them that any action of the Spirit outside their community had as its purpose the leading of people to Christ and his church.”⁶³

Catholicism does not believe there is no salvation outside the church. Vatican II makes it clear that even atheists are not necessarily excluded from salvation.⁶⁴ “Yet Catholicism insists that in another sense there is indeed no salvation outside the church. This implies that wherever the Spirit is at work, there too in some way or other is the church. It implies that any share an atheist may have in Christ’s unity with the Father is also in some way or other part of the church.”⁶⁵

Gaybba sees this as an “apparent contradiction” which can be only resolved “if one believes that ‘church’ is a reality that can find visible expression in varying degrees.” Those varying degrees are the varying degrees to which the Spirit can be present and expressed in the lives of people – which is effectively what Gaybba skirts around when he continues ...

To believe that the church is the sacrament of unity that stretches beyond its borders is to believe that the church is the visible, structured embodiment of a larger reality. This larger reality is the unity in love, of a wide variety of people. Such a unity can manifest itself in a variety of ways from genuine human love through belief in God, to the structured sacrament of unity in Christ that is the church in the strictest sense of the word. However, since the church in that strict sense of the word is the sacramental embodiment of a larger reality, that larger reality can also be given a name “church” but in a wide sense.⁶⁶

Church is wherever the Holy Spirit is “lived” and experienced.

So what?

The church must recognise that it has the power to create a new world, a new vision, new ethics, new values and a new identity for people. But converting people to narrow-minded and robotic ethics; and harbouring things such as “love”, “grace” and “healing” in the abstract; or as only intended for our enclave, is to disempower the gospel, and render the church irrelevant.

The church can no longer imagine itself relevant, without showing how its faith is applicable within a specific field. The recognition in development circles that fundamental development issues are issues of power (and hence values) elevates religion to a central role. Solving the crises of politics, food, power, and economics will need theologians to be working alongside economists, politicians, psychologists and other “secular” experts in implementing those values within societal structures.

The church’s lack of credibility arises in part from appearing not to have real-world, real-life answers. The language of the church sounds triumphalistic, unreal and even unrelated to what it

⁶¹ Quick 1960:291.

⁶² See Mark 9 v38-41.

⁶³ Gaybba 1987:26. Gaybba’s use of church here would necessarily imply the established “organisation,” e.g. Cornelius in Acts 10.

⁶⁴ Gaybba 1987:171.

⁶⁵ Gaybba 1987:172. There might be some objection to this approach of anonymous Christians and anonymous church as being arrogant. Yet, of course, we allow them to speak for themselves and choose their own names and “labels” graciously embracing them where they are, within their own metaphor, in the Spirit of Jesus declaring that, “Whoever is not against us, is for us” (Mark 9 v40). How can they be against us when they share our values and further our (and God’s) mission?

⁶⁶ Gaybba 1987:172.

is seen to be doing in the world and the world's perception of it. The church has to become the church once again, the living, active body of Christ in which the Spirit is found and through which people are served and brought to life. The church must, "stop preening itself with all sorts of metaphysical compliments without any corresponding social reality,"⁶⁷ and live lives that so incarnate the Spirit that people will be drawn to us and to God and to the church. Christian faith and obedience is more than getting our abstract intellectual ideas into order (as Western theology has sometimes seemed to imply) – Christian discipleship is getting our actions right ... we learn through actions.⁶⁸ The fullness of the Spirit will not be plumbed through a theological analysis of its Trinitarian character and role but, rather through working out what the Spirit's character, power and role mean in our world. What is said has no substance except in terms of what is done.

It is imperative that the life of "the church" be so characterised by the otherness (holiness) of the Spirit that people cannot fail to be drawn to it. This otherness necessarily implies being shaped by love for others and the world. It is loving people (and that includes working that love out in real and practical ways, not just "feeling" love) that is the work of the Spirit and, if the Holy Spirit is central to the church's identity, then the church is only the church to the extent that exists for others. The church must be continually evaluating whether its use of power is consistent with the Spirit of self-giving service devoted to peace and justice as demonstrated in the life of Jesus.

The church must evaluate all things first and foremost in the light of the Spirit instead of theological correctness (the Spirit would provide the litmus test of correctness) or issues of practice. The Spirit has no special programme that must be followed. Instead, the Spirit "creates ministries by creating the love that prompts people to see and respond to needs."⁶⁹ (Such an approach will allow "good news for the sinner" and "good news for the poor" not just to cooperate, but to be seen as mutually supporting partners.) This means that "church" can include both narrowly defined ecclesiastical structures as well as development (particularly "Christian" development) agencies, activists, politicians and individuals who work towards the establishment of a more loving and just society. The vision of the kingdom is shalom.⁷⁰ Myers is right when he says, "Whatever heals and restores, body, mind, spirit and community, all can be part of the better future towards which transformational development should point."⁷¹

Christian theology is highly relevant to this, but most likely needs to develop away from ideas of a fallen world that needs to be restored or an established order that needs to be maintained. The Jewish and Christian idea of covenant could be helpful here in speaking of a just, whole and peaceful world being created by men and women in partnership with God. Theology would need to play its part by bringing people into the vision of creating this perfect world (or, building the Kingdom of God), and in working out what it would be like and how best to achieve it. Whether this is a fundamentally new approach, the basic premise of most religions (healing this world and finding peace in it), or a well established but often disregarded "strand" of Christianity might be open for debate.

On one level, the problems would not be solved simply by people being "brought to Jesus", but, on another level, despite its depth and breadth, this is the key to the problem of development. The development problem will be solved as people are "born again" to using their power for others, when they are loving instead of being fearful, and serve the common good instead of their own ambition.

⁶⁷ Migliore 1991:187.

⁶⁸ Taylor 1995:125.

⁶⁹ Gaybba 1987:204.

⁷⁰ Shalom may be understood as that rich mix of justice, peace and harmonious relationships with self, God and the environment.

⁷¹ Myers 1999:113.

The Spirit is alive and irrevocably at work transforming this world into the kingdom of God, and where the Spirit is, there is the church. It is this church, holy and catholic, which is learning how to find universal peace, justice, healing and wholeness within this world. We choose and live and decide and act, but it remains the Spirit that effects, the Spirit that is like a light burning in the darkness which the darkness cannot put out ...

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