

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

The Holy Spirit, the Church and Christian Unity

A conference at the ecumenical Community of Bose, 14th-20th October 2002

A report from David Carter

A conference took place at the ecumenical Community of Bose on the Holy Spirit and Ecumenism from 14-20 October 2002. Over twenty ecumenists, more or less equally divided between North America and Europe, gathered. The British contingent consisted of Mary Tanner, Alan Sell, Geoffrey Wainwright (still a minister in connexion with the British Methodist Conference, despite his long sojourn in the States) and myself. The Conference was sponsored by the Suenens Foundation, which is located at the John Carroll University, USA, and organised by Professor Doris Donnelly of the same university.

Each speaker gave a short summary of his or her paper which was then followed by lively discussion. The following traditions were represented by one or more speakers: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, Methodist, Mennonite, Quaker, Pentecostalist, though no specific paper was devoted to the Methodist or Lutheran traditions. At the end, a statement was issued offering a summary of key points on the work of the Spirit within the Church and the search for unity.

The whole Conference was marked by a beautifully eirenic spirit, undoubtedly enhanced by the privilege of sharing in the very moving worship of the Community. Great stress was laid by several speakers on two key points: the sheer abundance of the varying gifts of the Spirit both within the particular churches and across the spectrum of the traditions. There was an attempt to comprehend within the totality of our understanding of the Spirit's work in the

Church not just the traditional 'Catholic' concerns with continuity in ministry and order and the 'Protestant' ones of the central role of the preached Word, but also the witness of the 'peace' churches to the importance of the lived witness of the local congregation and the Pentecostalist emphasis upon life transforming gifts. There was a common acceptance of a degree of disfigurement in all our churches on account of sin and separation.

Great emphasis was placed upon the spiritual aspect of ecumenism. Professor Famerée, a Catholic expert on Vatican II from Louvain-la-Neuve, emphasised the importance of a dialogue of love as being as great as, if not greater than, that of the theological dialogue. Sister Lorelei Fuchs, of the Graymoor Institute of the Friars of the Atonement stressed ecumenism not just as a duty laid upon us but as a faith to be lived and celebrated.

We were privileged to have with us, at the beginning, Cardinal Danneels, who gave an introductory paper in which he stressed the importance of the Spirit as God's self-gift to us and also emphasised that what we are most concerned with is not a quantity of doctrines but the quality of truth deriving from the self-revelation of God in the suffering of Jesus Christ. Later, we had a visit from Cardinal Walter Kasper, who charmed us all with his friendliness of manner and again pointed to the gift of the Spirit as the central constitutive feature of the Church's life. Metropolitan John Zizioulas gave an impressive paper on the Orthodox understanding of the work of the Spirit in the Church and Fr Boris Bobrinskoy, of the Institut St Serge in Paris, spoke of the total interrelatedness of the Trinity, focusing on the prayer, 'Abba, Father', as prayer first of Christ and then of the adopted children of God.

Great emphasis was placed on pneumatic ecclesiology, always balanced however by the simultaneous acknowledgement of the role of Christ. The nature of ecumenism as a process of joint discernment and learning was emphasised as was the importance of reception. It is hoped the papers will eventually be published by Peeters of Leuven.

Appendix – The Bose Statement

The following statement was issued:

Theologians from Europe, Africa and North America, from Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Mennonite, Quaker, Methodist and Pentecostal traditions, we met at the ecumenical monastery of Bose, Italy for the Second International Conference on the Holy Spirit and Ecumenism, October 14-20, 2002. The conference was sponsored by the Cardinal Suenens Center, John Carroll University, USA. We gathered together to consider the significance of the person and work of the Holy Spirit for the Church and its unity. Witnessing to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our deliberations we offer the following to the Churches:

We affirm that on the ground of the Son's saving work on the cross, the Father, by the Holy Spirit, calls the Church of Christ into being. Christ's work of redemption, from his conception to his resurrection and ascension, bears witness to the personal presence and action of the Holy Spirit. Sent at Pentecost by the Father in response to the prayer of the exalted Christ, the Holy Spirit is the Giver of life, the Guide into all truth, the Power of witness, the Event of koinonia or communion, the Prompter of praise and prayer, the Source of holiness, the Bestower of gifts, the Sigh of an expectant creation, and the Pledge of God's final kingdom. The integrity of the Holy Spirit's work is respected when this fullness is not narrowed by our limited openness to and reception of it.

The Holy Spirit, who takes the things of Christ and declares them, vivifies the preaching, the life of faith, the sacraments and the order of the Church, and is the guarantee of its communion in diversity. This communion embraces the various and manifold gifts, ministries, works, forms of discipleship and life together that bring to expression the riches of Christ in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

We gratefully acknowledge the measure of communion we enjoy as a gift of the Holy Spirit. We pray for new outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Although the Holy Spirit is given generously beyond our desire or imagination and is sent to Christ's Body as the fullness of the one who fills all things, we recognize that the churches have grieved and quenched the Holy Spirit. We trust God's faithfulness to perfect the Church and to bring all Christians to the fullness of unity by enabling them:

- to cooperate with the Giver of Life, the Breath by which all things exist. The Holy Spirit fosters new life in Christ Jesus through whom we are reconciled to God.
- to pursue the truth through the exercise of discernment. We look for what belongs to the Gospel in those things that appear to diverge and now divide us but which may in fact be manifestations of the manifold wisdom of Christ and the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- to engage in mission as one in the power of the Holy Spirit for the credibility of witness to the Gospel. We acknowledge our call to reach the ends of the earth with the Gospel and bring the comfort of Christ's presence until the end of the age.
- to be led by the Holy Spirit into deeper and enduring levels of communion, a participation of the Church in the life of the triune God.
- to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, as sons and daughters in Christ, to offer worship to the Father with one mind and heart calling upon God for the necessary gifts and graces to advance the unity of the Church.
- to rejoice in the holiness given to the Church, and in a spirit of repentance for sins that obscure the image of Christ in his Body to

pray for the purification and renewal of the life and unity of the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- to receive the various gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes and that are encountered in one another's churches.
- to enter into the groaning of creation for God's justice and peace through solidarity and service with the poor and marginalized.
- to rekindle hope for the restoration of the unity God desires for the Church and to commit ourselves in the way of discipleship "as we await the coming of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

We recognize significant trends that have emerged in the quest for Christian unity requiring further attention. An ecclesiology of *koinonia* or communion appears to be one of the most promising theological themes for the renewal and reform of the Church. Communion in the triune God sets in a new light issues of authority, ministry and primacy among others.

We see the need for the churches to engage in careful and continuing discernment of the Holy Spirit's presence and action in the present age. An important aspect of discernment is communication of insights gathered through dialogue with one another. In this connection the question of how far the achievements of dialogue are being received by the churches needs to be addressed urgently. Reception is a Spirit-led process extending to all the faithful. Reception is both an open and critical process. It entails renewal in our own lives and changes in our relationships with others. We see the need for our churches to be open to mutually receive the gifts they have to offer one another. It is our firm desire that Christians who are not currently a part of our conversations would be led by God's grace to share in our search for Christian unity . We pray, come Holy Spirit.