

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY: A FEMINIST-PNEUMATOLOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

With respect to women in ministry, it is not enough merely to establish an egalitarian theological anthropology. In order to attend to the issue in a systemic fashion, the ecclesiological aspect of the problem must also be addressed. While it is true that the justification for limiting women in ministry is rooted in certain dualistic anthropological assumptions that must be dismantled, ecclesiological structures must ultimately be scrutinized, too. This is the case because even after correcting the dualistic anthropology that justifies excluding women from positions of ministry, one is still left with another form of dualism, namely, that of the clergy over the laity. Welcoming women to ecclesial positions from which they have historically been excluded without restructuring the patriarchal formation within the church merely includes women in the perpetuation of this distorted ordering of reality. Consequently, in order to effect a real and lasting transformation, a new vision of the church must be envisioned and embraced.

Chapter Six offered theological resources for constructing a Feminist-Pneumatological ecclesiology. This chapter is an attempt to utilize those resources toward such a construction. As noted in Chapter Six, feminist ecclesiology has offered various metaphors and ideas that help to re-imagine the purpose and function of the church. Below I will utilize those feminist ecclesiologies to serve as foundations for other feminist insights and pneumatological themes. To target the 'Pentecostal Church' is not to exclude other traditions from the applications, but rather to note the specific context and focus of this work and of the implications proposed below.

7.1. The Pentecostal Church As a Discipleship of Equals

7.1.1. Connections

Schüssler Fiorenza offers a renewed vision for the church, claiming that the church should be a discipleship of equals characterized by a vision

and practice of radical democracy. Her claims are grounded in her understanding of the identity and praxis of the Jesus movement and the early Christian missionary movement. However, she is largely dependent upon Pauline literature—notably Galatians 3:26-28—to inform her notion of the discipleship of equals and to define its distinctives. Schüssler Fiorenza claims that Galatians 3:26-28 is the fundamental expression of the theological self-understanding of the early Christian missionary movement. With this approach the discipleship of equals is viewed through a christological lens and takes on a distinctly christo-centric orientation. Water baptism is the rite of initiation, and new creation centers on the believer being ‘in Christ.’

Nonetheless, this christological lens can be complemented with a pneumatological lens so that the discipleship of equals takes on a more pneumatological dimension. While Galatians 3:26-28 may serve as a key expression of the theological self-understanding of the early Christian missionary movement, Acts 2:17-21 can aptly function in this capacity as well.¹ Here Spirit baptism becomes the rite of initiation, and new creation centers on the believer being ‘in the Spirit,’ in addition to being ‘in Christ.’ The resulting community that is defined by such distinctives will be characterized as a discipleship of equals as the *outpouring of the Spirit* constitutes a radical democratizing of the people. A pneumatologically constituted discipleship of equals is committed to being a Spiritual community that strives to be faithful to the way of life that springs forth once the Spirit is poured out. This discipleship of equals is guided by the vision of the Isaianic New Exodus.

One can press this notion of the discipleship of equals even further with respect to pneumatology. Commenting on her usage of the word ‘disciple,’ Schüssler Fiorenza says,

The word ‘disciple’ is a translation of the Greek word ‘learner’ and designates someone whose allegiance is to the vision and commitment of a

¹ While Schüssler Fiorenza might disagree with this statement since she views Acts as a book focused on recounting the deeds of Peter and Paul rather than recalling the history of the early Christian missionary movement, her opinion does not account for the predominance of the Isaianic New Exodus program. Consequently, Acts 2 functions as more than just a prologue to the ministry of Peter and Paul. Acts 2 explains the existence and identity of the early Christian missionary movement. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1984), 160–99.