

Pentecost 2006
“Preparing for the 40th anniversary of CCR”
Pentecost Day Celebration
“My soul magnifies the Lord”
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“The grace of the Holy Spirit”

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1. Sanctifying and charismatic action of the Spirit in the Bible

In the Bible two lines of action emerge, one after the other, concerning the manifestation of the Spirit.

a. The first, that we could call the *charismatic* line, is the one that presents the Spirit as a power that on certain occasions breaks in upon special people, giving them the ability to do things and to explain reality in a way that is not humanly possible. The Spirit comes upon someone and fills that person with wisdom, or artistic giftedness for the embellishment of the Temple (Exodus 31, 3; 35, 31); he comes upon another and fills him with the gift of prophecy (Micah 3, 8), or gifts of extraordinary ability in governing (Isaiah 11, 2), or supernatural physical strength to use in saving the people (Judges 13, 25).

b. The second line, that of *sanctification*, on the other hand, began to be seen in the Prophets and the Psalms after the exile. In Ezekiel God announces: “*I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you [...] I shall put my spirit within you and make you keep my laws and sincerely respect my observances*” (Ez 36, 26 – 27). In Psalm 51: 12 f., for the first time, the Spirit is given the title “Holy”, associating him with the process of being made clean and renewed in heart.

The fundamental difference is that the *charismatic action* of the Spirit passes through, without remaining in the person who receives it; its aim is not the betterment of the particular person but rather the good of the community as a whole. The particular person may not be made any holier through the charism he has received; he may even abuse the gift and turn it into a reason for his own reprobation as shown by the story of Saul and Salomon. On the contrary the *sanctifying action* of the Spirit remains within the person who receives it, who is renewed by it and transformed from within.

The first line will again come to the fore in the New Testament revelation concerning the charisms, the gifts and the works of the Holy Spirit that are seen, first in Jesus of Nazareth, and later, after Pentecost, in the Church. The second line finds its apex in what will be called “*the sanctifying action of the Spirit*” (See 2 Thessalonian 2, 13; 1 Peter 1, 2), consisting in new life in the Spirit and, more concretely, in charity. Paul would make a synthesis of these two lines of action of the Spirit, speaking in order, first, of the charisms, and then, of charity (see 1 Corinthians 12 – 14). He stresses the superiority of charity, but recognises that both lines are necessary to the Church, as coming from the same Spirit and intended for the same purpose, which is the building up of the body of Christ.

2. Sanctifying and charismatic action of the Spirit in the account of Pentecost

Let us now try to see how these two ways of acting of the Holy Spirit are both present and manifested in the account of Pentecost, in Acts 2:

a. The transforming and sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is expressed in the link the author establishes in Acts 2, 1:4a between Pentecost and Sinai (Exodus 19 ff.) and the implicit quotation of Ezekiel 36. Coming upon the Church on the day of Pentecost when Israel celebrated the gift of the Law written by the finger of God on tablets of stone on Mount Sinai, the Holy Spirit appears to be the new interior law, “*the Law of the Spirit*” (Rom 12,2), written by the finger of God, this time not on tablets of stone but on the hearts of people, working through love and leading languages and peoples to a new unity.

The traditional punctuation in verses 4 and 5 seems to reduce being “filled with the Holy Spirit” to starting “speaking in tongues”, but verse 4b (“*and they started speaking in tongues*”) is linked more to what follows (“*there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem*”) than to what precedes. “Being filled with the Holy Spirit” means much more than “speaking in tongues”!

This transforming action of the Spirit is made visible by the radical conversion of the apostles. From being self-centered they pass to being Christ-centered. No longer interested in establishing who was the greatest among them, they are now proclaiming the great deeds of God and the lordship of Christ (Acts 2: 11.36). From wanting “to make a name for themselves” like the builders of Babel (Gen 11, 1 ff), they only want to make a name for God. A heart of flesh has replaced the heart of stone.

b. On the other hand, the charismatic action of the Holy Spirit is stressed in the account of Pentecost through the insistence upon the gift of tongues and the quotation of Joel, in which prophecy, visions, dreams, miracles and signs are spoken of (Acts 2, 13-2).

3. Sanctifying and charismatic action of the Spirit in the Charismatic Renewal

These two ways of acting of the Spirit have been dramatically manifested in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

a. First the sanctifying action and inner transformation. Yves Congar, one of the leading theologians of Vatican Council II, in his address to the International Congress of Pneumatology held at the Vatican on the sixteenth centenary of the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, said:

“How can we avoid situating the so-called charismatic stream, better known as the Renewal in the Spirit, here with us? It has spread like a brushfire. It is far more than a fad... In one primary aspect, it resembles revival movements from the past: the public and verifiable character of spiritual action which changes people’s lives. . . . It brings youth, a freshness and new possibilities into the bosom of the old Church, our mother. In fact, except for very rare occasions, the Renewal has remained *within* the Church and, far from challenging long-standing institutions, it reanimates them.” (Yves Congar, *Actualité de la Pneumatologie*, in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, vol. 1, p. 18).

The most common result of the baptism in the Spirit is a new awareness and experience of the love of God. The almost unanimous answer to the question “What has been the main blessing the Charismatic Renewal has brought into your life?”, asked in view of the Newman Consultation held in Birmingham in summer 2005 was this: “For the first time I realised that I was loved by God, I experienced the love and the tenderness of God, I understood what it means to be son or daughter of God...”

A new experience of grace accompanies this experience. It is sufficient to hear “Amazing grace...” sung by a charismatic assembly to realise this. Spontaneity of joyfulness, living Christian life being attracted to the Lord, and not because of fear or force, are also common traits of the new life in the Spirit. People discover what Christianity is all about!

Through what has come aptly to be called the baptism in the Spirit, we experience the Holy Spirit himself, his anointing in our prayer, his power in our apostolic service, his consolation in our trials, his light upon the choices we make. More basic than any manifestation of the Spirit in the charisms, this is the first way we perceive the Holy Spirit, as transforming us from within, giving us a desire to praise God and a taste for praise, leading us to discover a new joy in life, opening our mind to understand the Scripture, teaching us to cry, “Abba, Father” and “Jesus is Lord”, giving us courage to take on new and difficult tasks in the service of God and neighbour.

b. And what do we say about the charisms? The CCR has been an answer to the prayer of John XXIII for “a new Pentecost for the Church” and to *Lumen gentium* 12 which placed charisms back at the heart of the Church: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes the People holy, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills (see 1 Cor 12, 11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank... Whether these charisms be more remarkable or more simple and widely diffused, they are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, since they are fitting and useful for the needs of the Church”.

From being confined to the *hagiography* (the lives of saints), the charisms are now the object of the *ecclesiology* (the study of the Church), giving a new foundation and dignity to the role of lay people within the body of Christ.

What is typical about the Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal is the re-emerging in it of some special charisms, named the “pentecostal charisms”, which were common in the primitive Christian community (see Cor 12-14). Today there is an insistence on the “founding charism”, that is the collective charism of a religious order or ecclesial movement. This is a secondary and late extension of the term “charism” which should not overshadow the original, biblical meaning of charism as intended by Paul and the rest of the NT. I wonder if in these cases the word “spirituality” would be more appropriate than the word “charism”. Franciscan spirituality, for instance, instead of Franciscan charism, and so on.

4. Final remarks

There has been, and still is, a tension within the CCR between the two works of the Spirit I have tried to illustrate, the sanctifying and the charismatic action. Some stress the first action (personal holiness, sacraments, good standing within the institutional Church), some the second (manifestation of charisms and power). In some cases this has led to splits and divisions within the CCR of a country. The lesson we gather from the Bible and the account

of Pentecost is that we should keep them together. As no one can exhaust by himself the fullness of the Spirit, to achieve this goal it is necessary to allow in practice a certain flexibility and freedom, each acknowledging the gift of the other as long as they are recognised by the Church or local bishop.

Do we then make a triumphant balance of the first 40 years of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal? No. The CCR, like any other human reality within the Church, has also shown problematic sides, excesses, divisions and sins, real betrayals of the Spirit. We have sometimes made it more difficult for the rest of the Church to accept this move of the Spirit. We should therefore allow the Paraclete once again to “convince us of sin”, both individually and collectively, and ask for forgiveness.

But let us leave repentance for another moment. The best thing to do on this joyful occasion is to shout out our deep-felt gratitude to the Holy Trinity and on behalf of the entire CCR of the world, intone our Magnificat to the Spirit. And if words are insufficient to express all our enthusiasm and thankfulness, then let us leave aside words and start singing in tongues...