

Baptised in the Holy Spirit

2. My personal reflections

I see two principal phases in the Catholic reflection on the Renewal and on its central grace, being baptized in the Holy Spirit. I sense that a third phase is now opening, helped I hope by the new ICCRS document. The first phase in the 1970s was a season marked by the freshness of the experience of the Renewal, by the initial descriptions and explanations, and by an apologetic element aiming to protect this work of God. One sought to address the fears and the concerns of the hierarchy, and to reply to criticisms and suspicions. The second phase in the 1980s and 1990s was characterized by the concern fully to integrate the Renewal into the life of the Church, expressed in the slogan «Moving to the Heart of the Church» and in the book of Frs. Montague and McDonnell *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit*¹.

I regard the second phase with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the concern to be at the heart of the Church is evidently right and fundamental. But this process involved real dangers. The charismatic renewal is a prophetic event in its essence. As Fr Raniero Cantalamessa has said: «The Renewal is prophetic or it is nothing.» So it is necessary that what is brought to the heart of the Church is the Renewal in its full prophetic reality, and not simply a reduced and watered-down version. Probably the most prophetic element that was weakened in this process was the ecumenical dimension, a point to which we will return. The eschatological thrust of the Renewal, never very strong in the Catholic renewal, almost disappeared, another point to pursue !

The theological position of Montague and McDonnell that became the dominant Catholic explanation among charismatic Catholics suffers in my opinion from too great a concern to have an undoubtedly solid Catholic presentation at the expense of truly considering all the dimensions of this phenomenon and to reflect on them. The terminology of «effusion of the Spirit » was formulated with the same concern, but in my view adds nothing significant to our understanding. But in the English-speaking world the terminology of «baptism in the Holy Spirit» had already become the standard language, that then had to be justified theologically.

In my book *The Glory and the Shame*, that appeared in 1994, I expressed an idea that I now find more and more to the point, «the original Pentecostal use of the term “baptism in the Spirit” was primarily prophetic. It is an interpretation of contemporary experience in the light of the Scriptures rather than exegesis of the Scriptures illuminated by present circumstances. The designation of this work as baptism in the Spirit was not simply the result of study of the New Testament, but was a spiritual interpretation and prophetic proclamation that ‘This is That’ which was spoken of by prophet Joel and initially experienced on the day of Pentecost.» (p. 46). These remarks were about the origins of the Pentecostal movement, but they remain relevant for the charismatic renewal.

If this interpretation is correct, it underlines the point that the Renewal is a sovereign act of the Almighty, and that baptism in the Holy Spirit belongs to the charismatic dimension of the Church. I suggest therefore that our theological reflections can move forward through a deeper penetration of the distinction of Bl. John Paul II in his address of Pentecost 1998 in Rome between the institutional and the charismatic dimensions of the Church, the two together being co-constitutive of the Church. Perhaps the clearest biblical formulation of these two dimensions is in Eph. 2, 20, «[you are] built upon the

¹ *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991).

foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone.» Such an understanding would remove the danger of trying to create a doctrine of baptism in the Spirit alongside our doctrine of baptism as a sacrament, for the two realities belong to different dimensions of the life of the Church. The sacrament of baptism belongs to the institutional element (the Word of God, all the sacraments and the ministerial structures), while baptism in the Spirit belongs to the charismatic element. This distinction makes it easier to understand the importance of the description in the ICCRS document of the characteristics of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Though I feel that the conclusions and even the document as a whole do not quite rise to the levels of some of the points made within it, particularly that the Renewal is a sovereign gift of God and that the baptism in the Holy Spirit belongs to the charismatic dimension of the Church. There is always this tension between the prophetic - charismatic dimension and the laudable desire that is deeply felt to be received with approval by the authorities of the Church. So in my view the formulation of McDonnell and Montague tries to fit what is intrinsically charismatic into the sacramental framework, and thus is based on a confusion of categories. In consequence their theory reduces its power and its challenge to our theology and to our baptismal practice.

The institutional-charismatic distinction enables us to emphasize at one and the same time the foundational character of the sacrament of baptism and the providential et transformative character of the charismatic activity of the glorified Lord who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Without a deepened theology of the sacrament of baptism, one cannot understand the importance of being baptized in the Spirit for the Church of our day. Thus the affirmation of both elements, the institutional and the charismatic, is essential for the affirmation of the realities, that belong to different ecclesial categories, in order to avoid the subordination of the charismatic to the institutional (Catholic tendency) or the exaltation of baptism in the Spirit at the expense of sacramental baptism (Pentecostal tendency).

I would add that to the best of my knowledge the first theologian to speak of the necessary and complementary contribution of the historic Churches and of the free Churches was M. Dallièrè, the founder of the Union de Prière de Charmes in his teachings in summer 1956 on «Church and Evangelisation». In his presentation, the Church corresponds to the institutional-structural dimension and Evangelisation to the charismatic-dynamic dimension. There was also the book of Lesslie Newbigin «The Household of God » (1955) which saw the Catholic (order-structure-sacraments), the Protestant (the Word) et the Pentecostal (Spirit and life) as complementary elements for the fullness and the health of the whole Church.

The sovereign and the prophetic element of the Renewal is shown particularly in its eschatological thrust. With every prophetic thrust, there is a sovereign dimension of the world to come breaking into this world. So one has to distinguish within the eschatological faith of the Church between the institutional and constant element (the eschatological character of the gospel, evident throughout the New Testament and expressed in each liturgy) and the charismatic element which is not constant and by which the Holy Spirit awakens the Church to the hour on the divine calendar and makes her attentive to the needs of the times in which the Church interprets and preaches the eschatological gospel. The institutional element alone is not adequate to address the needs of each age, and it is through the charismatic element that the Church can read the signs of the times. But without the institutional element the prophetic interpretations lack their proper foundation in the Gospel that does not change.

The Holy Spirit unveils the depths of God, the mystery of Christ, the eternal plan of the Most High. I will quote here a passage written by Bishop Albert de Monléon, op : “The charisms are given by the Holy Spirit so as to bear witness to Christ for the growth of the Church, but they are given for the time that separates Pentecost from the coming of the Lord in his glory. They are exercised in expectation of «the Revelation of the Lord», in order to prepare for and to hasten the definitive manifestation of the Kingdom that is coming.» When we study the promises of St. John the Baptist that Jesus will baptize in/ with Holy Spirit, the eschatological context is very clear, particularly in Matthew and Luke (see Matt. 3 : 11 - 12 and Luke 3 : 16 - 17).

Historically it is clear that revival movements emphasizing the Holy Spirit produce a heightened eschatological expectation. In the origins of the Pentecostal movement, there were two dominant convictions: «Pentecost has come» and «The Lord is coming». One of the best studies of Pentecostal origins insists on the fact that heightened eschatological expectation was much more central than speaking in tongues. This expectation was expressed in many songs and choruses coming from charismatic milieux, but more strongly perhaps in the free church circles than among Catholics. In France, the Union de Prière of Charmes had always had a strong sense for the coming of the Lord. Among their four prayer subjects, the first three (revival and conversion ; the illumination of Israel; and the organic visible unity of the Body of Christ) were seen as totally oriented towards the fourth, the coming of Christ in glory and the resurrection of the dead. I have written that the four prayer subjects of the Union de Prière formulated by M. Dallièrè represent a profound prophetic interpretation of the meaning of the Pentecostal-charismatic currents of the Spirit of the twentieth century. When I look at the history of these currents, I see that, even if there have been tendencies towards a weakening of the eschatological and ecumenical dimensions, they are constantly the object of new impulses of the Holy Spirit in order to bring them back into the awareness of the Christian world.

The eschatological context of the scriptural promises that the Lord himself will baptize with Spirit is linked to the use of the verbal and not the substantive (noun) form. By contrast, the noun form is found several times in the New Testament for the sacrament of baptism. The substantive “baptism” suggests something that can be defined and that can be clearly identified. The verbal forms “baptize” and “baptized” indicate an action, an event, that the verbal form does not specify. The verbal form belongs to prophetic utterance, typically speaking of the action of God, and can have different degrees and phases of fulfilment. The pressure to define the relationship between baptism in the Spirit and the sacrament of baptism is a consequence of the use of the noun form. The noun form produces a liturgy of baptism and a doctrine of the sacrament. We need to reflect theologically on what it means to «be baptized in the Holy Spirit», but I am not convinced that it is either possible or desirable to seek to formulate a doctrine of baptism in the Spirit. We have a great need of this prophetic work of the Spirit, and of a corresponding theology, but we do not need a doctrine. A corresponding theology would be an ecclesiology based on the co-constitutive elements of the institutional and the charismatic. The doctrine of the Church concerns what is permanent, and provides the framework in which we can rightly receive and understand the new charismatic and prophetic impulses. This distinction does not mean that the essential elements of the Church institution (the Word of God in the Scriptures, the liturgy, the Credo, the official teaching, etc) do not come from the Holy Spirit nor that they are not truly the instruments of the Spirit. But the permanent elements do not belong to the “unpredictable” of the Spirit, the element which is not at all a *tour disposal*.

The charismatic character of the Renewal makes possible a consideration of the question : Why has this happened at this point in history? Why in our day? The traditional Catholic dogmatic theology did not ask such questions, for dogmatic theology typically treated what had existed since the beginning and that belongs to the permanent structures of the faith. So in my view it is essential to develop a theology that includes both the institutional-permanent and the charismatic-eruptive in order to have an eschatology that is adequate and alive. Without such a framework, it is not really possible for the Church to prepare for the coming of the Lord in glory.

The sovereign character of the action of the Lord in the Renewal, manifested first when Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit, is also shown in its “ecumenical” or “inter-confessional” dimension. It is a visible demonstration that the sovereignty of God is not limited by the frontiers between the churches and the confessions. Although we are ourselves constrained by the laws of the Church, the Lord is not. This is a powerful corrective to all our tendencies to erect barriers, that may be necessary for the most part in the present situation, and to turn them into absolutes. The institutional-charismatic distinction helps us also in the ecumenical domain. Like eschatology, ecumenism involves both elements. The constant institutional element is that unity always remains an essential mark of the Church, that division is always an evil to be avoided and to be overcome, and that the prayer of Jesus for unity in Jn. 17 : 21 is not limited to a particular epoch. But the charismatic character of the Renewal and its importance for Christian unity shows that the Renewal in its present form is a grace for our time and an instance of the creativity of the Holy Spirit, that is always at work though in different ways. It is because of this charismatic character that the Renewal in the different confessions manifests itself as the same grace of the Holy Spirit.

My 1987 book *One Lord One Spirit One Body* directly addressed the intrinsically ecumenical character of the charismatic movement. In 1989 - 90, following the publication of the French translation, there were some accusations that I was proposing the existence of a transconfessional or ecumenical church over and above the actual incarnate Church of history. There were also those in Germany who misrepresented me in saying I was arguing for an *Überkonfessionnelle Kirche* (a church above the historic church bodies). In fact, what I was suggesting is that through this outpouring of the Spirit in the Renewal, the Holy Spirit was creating a new level of spiritual unity between those who have been baptized in the Spirit. I added that this spiritual unity is only embryonic like a breath from on high to move forward the restoration of an organic and visible unity that is the true goal of the ecumenical movement. The importance of the charismatic movement for unity is indicated and underlined by its sovereign and unexpected character. The Lord acts sovereignly to speed up the dynamic towards unity beyond the seemingly insurmountable barriers in the way. As I see it, it is especially because of the Renewal that the Pentecostals and the Evangelicals have begun to regard relationships with the Catholic Church as possible and even desirable.

I want to return to the question of the phases in our understanding and our presentation of baptism in the Spirit. I see a parallel with the Pentecostal origins. In the first years of the Pentecostal movement there was simply the proclamation that Jesus was now baptizing with his Holy Spirit with the signs of Pentecost. But a need was soon felt to defend this current against attacks coming from other Christians, almost all from an Evangelical background. The criticisms centred on two points: (a) the question of “subsequence”, that is to say that baptism in the Spirit is a second (or third) experience different from and subsequent to conversion, to water-baptism and regeneration ; (b) the question of « initial evidence », that is to say the teaching that the only acceptable evidence that one has

received the baptism in the Spirit is speaking in tongues. Therefore no tongues, no baptism. This is still the teaching of the majority of the Pentecostal denominations, though there are exceptions (as in Britain with the Elim Pentecostal Church, but what is interesting from a Catholic point of view is that all the Pentecostals insist on some form of visible evidence, which is an implicit rejection of the idea that the Church and the work of God remain invisible. For almost 90 years, these two points dominated Pentecostal debates. On the first point, the Pentecostals were defending themselves against Evangelical critics, on the second it was an argument primarily among Pentecostals. It is only in the last ten or more years that Pentecostal theologians have begun to escape from the narrow perspectives and to formulate a theology of baptism in the Spirit that examines all aspects of this reality. Here I wish to recommend a book by a Pentecostal theologian from the United States, well grounded in European theology: *Baptized in the Spirit* by Frank Macchia. In fact, Macchia's book presents the whole Christian life, personal and ecclesial, as transformed by this immersion in the Spirit of the living God. Thus he treats of all its consequences - salvific, missionary, ethical, liturgical, anthropological and eschatological.

I mention this history because I see a parallel process, although in a totally different context, in the formulation of Catholic presentation of the baptism or the effusion in the Spirit. While for the Pentecostals the apologetic pressures led them to focus on the relationship between baptism in the Spirit as experience and conversion, for the Catholics the pressure has been to focus on the relationship between baptism in the Spirit and the sacrament(s) of baptism (and confirmation). In the Catholic debate, the need was to defend this central grace of the Renewal against the accusations of teaching two baptisms or of diminishing the significance of the sacrament of baptism. Certainly within the Catholic tradition, with its great theological and spiritual riches, there are a number of books on the Renewal that express the rich and profound fruit that is found in the whole movement. But I think that what has been lacking have been systematic studies of the great Trinitarian work that is taking place when Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit and when we believers open ourselves up to this overwhelming love and power of the Lord. So I hope that just as a third phase has opened in Pentecostal theology with the work of Macchia and others, a third stage may open for a Catholic theology of the baptism in the Spirit, aided by this new document from ICCRS.

At the centre of the third stage I see the key point as the sovereign character of the action of the risen Lord in pouring out His Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The sovereign character signifies the Lordship of Jesus above the Church His Body. The charismatic and prophetic impulses, manifested on the large scale in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, recalls the Church to this Lordship of which she remains always the servant who manages the household or tends the vineyard as in the parables of the Kingdom in the teaching of Jesus.

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