

RALPH MARTIN

A New Pentecost?

Catholic Theology and “Baptism in the Spirit”

One thing, however, is certain: the face of the Church of the third millennium depends on our capacity to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church of our time (cf. Rev 2:7). . . . It depends, therefore, on our capacity to be amazed by the charismatic gifts that the Holy Spirit is lavishing on the Church today with extraordinary generosity. And it depends on the wisdom and generous farsightedness of Pastors who do not quench the Spirit, but test everything and hold fast to what is good (cf. 1 Thes 5:12, 19–21).

STANISLAW CARDINAL RYLKO

President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity¹

IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN FORTY YEARS since the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church first appeared and nearly that long since the first attempts to theologially understand the core experience of this renewal—“baptism in the Holy Spirit”—from a Catholic point of view.

“Baptism in the Spirit” is the main terminology used in North America to describe an experience of the Spirit that is often accompanied by a deeper personal encounter with Christ, characterized by a glimpse of his Lordship, an experience of the Father’s love

that is personal and deeply liberating, and a new awareness that we are truly not orphans but that the Holy Spirit is truly present and ready to encourage, convict, guide, and help us understand the things of God.² This vital experience of the Trinity brings with it a new or renewed desire for prayer, including in a special way praise, adoration, and thanksgiving; a new or renewed desire to read the Scripture, often described as “the scriptures coming alive”; and a desire to tell others about the goodness of God. It is also frequently accompanied by a desire to be in relationship with other Christians and by the manifestation of one or more of the charisms listed in 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4, and Romans 12. Fr. Francis Sullivan, SJ, offers this as a brief definition of the experience: “A religious experience which initiates a decisively new sense of the powerful presence and working of God in one’s life, which working usually involves one or more charismatic gifts.”³

It has been understood from the very first theological reflection, in 1969, that the term “baptism in the Spirit” had its primary referent to the giving of the Spirit in the sacraments of Christian initiation, its usage in the New Testament, and that it was only being used analogously to describe the experience of those already validly baptized and confirmed Catholics. “If we were to be more precise we would not talk of receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, but of renewing the Baptism in the Spirit.”⁴

While the organized forms of this renewal have ebbed and flowed in various countries at various times, it remains one of the most widespread and influential of the movements in the Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council and is present in more than 120 countries with more than 100 million Catholics to date experiencing what has been called “baptism in the Spirit.”⁵ The Catholic charismatic renewal is generally seen as part of a much wider phenomenon, the broader Pentecostal movement that began at the turn of the twentieth century and that now numbers more than 500 million participants.⁶

Since the appeal of Pope John XXIII that the whole Church pray

in preparation for the Second Vatican Council asking God to send us a “new Pentecost,” there has been a strong and continuing emphasis from the papacy on the need of the Church, and of each of us as individuals, to experience today the work of the Spirit as we see it described in the accounts of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles. Following the council, Pope Paul IV wrote in *Gaudete in domino*,

Assuredly we have here a work of the Spirit, a gift of Pentecost. One must also recognize a prophetic intuition on the part of our predecessor John XXIII, who envisaged a kind of new Pentecost as a fruit of the Council. We too have wished to place ourself in the same perspective and in the same attitude of expectation. Not that Pentecost has ever ceased to be an actuality during the whole history of the Church, but so great are the needs and the perils of the present age, so vast the horizon of mankind drawn towards world coexistence and powerless to achieve it, that there is no salvation for it except in a new outpouring of the gift of God.⁷

Along the same lines, Pope John Paul II in *Christifideles laici* interpreted the whole postconciliar spiritual renewal in the Catholic Church as “a renewed outpouring of the Spirit of Pentecost” (2). In his address on the eve of the feast of Pentecost in 1998, given to over 500,000 people representing more than fifty different renewal movements, John Paul gathered together the teaching of Scripture and the Second Vatican Council on the reality of Pentecost and the gifts of the Spirit, and proclaimed it with urgency and passion. At one point, he stated:

The institutional and charismatic aspects are co-essential as it were to the Church’s constitution. They contribute, although differently, to the life, renewal and sanctification of God’s People. It is from this providential rediscovery of the Church’s charismatic dimension that before and after the Council, a remarkable pattern of growth has been established for ecclesial

movements and new communities. . . . You present here, are the tangible proof of this “outpouring” of the Spirit.⁸

He then made this extraordinary plea to all Christians: “Today, I would like to cry out to all of you gathered here in St. Peter’s Square and to all Christians: Open yourselves docilely to the gifts of the Spirit! Accept gratefully and obediently the charisms which the Spirit never ceases to bestow on us!”

Pope Benedict XVI has also taken up this theme. In a 2008 address reflecting on the text from Acts in which Jesus promises his disciples that they will be baptized in the Spirit, Benedict made an invitation to the whole Church, saying, “Today I would like to extend this invitation to everyone: Let us rediscover, dear brothers and sisters, the beauty of being baptized in the Holy Spirit; let us be aware again of our Baptism and of our confirmation, sources of grace that are always present. Let us ask the Virgin Mary to obtain a renewed Pentecost for the Church again today, a Pentecost that will spread in everyone the joy of living and witnessing to the Gospel.”⁹

Certainly it cannot be claimed that Benedict, by using the biblical terminology of baptism in the Holy Spirit, is asking everyone to be baptized in the Holy Spirit as it is understood and experienced in the Catholic charismatic renewal. It must be acknowledged, however, that he is making a very strong call to a renewal of the graces of baptism and confirmation in relationship to the event of Pentecost and its substance, which is described by Jesus as being “baptized in the Spirit.” It must also be acknowledged that Benedict is perfectly aware of the use of this terminology to describe what the Catholic charismatic renewal calls baptism in the Spirit.

The consistent appeals from the papacy therefore give a special importance to the discussion of baptism in the Spirit, which the Catholic charismatic renewal has identified as the primary reality of a new Pentecost, and to which since 1967 many respected Catholic theologians and scripture scholars within the renewal have devoted considerable theological reflection. From this wealth of study, I will

examine what I consider to be the three main interpretations that have emerged and then give my own evaluation of these interpretations and offer some conclusions. While I will identify three main interpretations, it is important to also note that within each interpretation there are variations and distinctions that I will not address.

*The First Theological Interpretation:
Baptism in the Spirit and Christian Initiation*

The predominant interpretation of baptism in the Spirit is a “stirring up” or “renewal,” a “releasing” or “actualization” of the gift of the Spirit given in the sacraments of Christian initiation, primarily of baptism and confirmation. Fr. George Montague and Fr. Killian McDonnell’s scriptural, theological, and historical study of Christian initiation during the first eight centuries contains perhaps the most comprehensive argumentation for this view, though many others adopt it as well. This was the primary interpretation given by the first theologians to publish studies on the question.¹⁰ It must also be noted that the theological interpretation given by the participants in the 1967 “Duquesne weekend,” which is widely viewed as the birth of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church and whose participants included professors of theology, was that what they had experienced was an answer to their prayer for a renewal of their baptism and confirmation and the coming of the Spirit as they found it described in the Acts of the Apostles.¹¹ This is certainly not without significance in the attempt to theologically understand baptism in the Spirit as linked with the sacraments of Christian initiation but, at the same time, it is not decisive.

The exegetical consensus upon which this view is based sees baptism in the Spirit, as presented in the New Testament, as a description of what happens in Christian initiation. In this view the baptism of the Spirit is closely linked with baptism in water. Even though there are exceptions as to the order of events, such as depicted in Acts 8 (“the Pentecost of the Samaritans”) or in Acts 10 (“the Pen-

tecost of the Gentiles”), these are viewed precisely as exceptions, with the norm being first conversion, then baptism in water, and later anointing with oil and laying on of hands, all of which together are understood as Christian initiation or baptism in the Spirit. This exegesis sees the experiential dimension of Christian initiation or baptism in the Spirit as being normative as well, signified by the frequent accompaniment of the manifestation of charismatic gifts of the Spirit in conjunction with Christian initiation or baptism in the Spirit. No one gift is usually singled out as being the necessary sign of baptism in the Spirit as non-Catholic theology sometimes does with the gift of tongues.

The scriptural basis for the prospect of a “renewal” of the receiving of the Spirit or a “stirring up” of a gift once given but since “gone quiet” is the Acts 4 text, in which the persecuted companions of Peter and John pray for and receive new power for evangelization, and the 2 Timothy 1:6f text, in which Paul urges Timothy to “stir into flame the gift (*charisma*) of God that you have through the imposition of my hands,” probably in reference to a special gift of the Spirit given in conjunction with ordination.

Montague and McDonnell support their thesis by a review of the available evidence from the first eight centuries of the Church, which evidence they argue shows that the sacraments of Christian initiation were often characterized by an experiential dimension and manifestations of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit.¹²

They postulate that the shift from adult to infant baptism, the reaction against Montanism and its prophetic excesses, the growth of an empire-approved Christianity, with the subsequent influx of converts of varying degrees of sincerity, and the subsequent lessening of the standards for baptismal preparation, all contributed to a decline in the experience of the Spirit and his gifts in conjunction with Christian initiation that the present outpouring of the Holy Spirit is seen as recovering.

The strong claim they are making on the basis of their research is that baptism in the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of charis-

matic gifts as experienced in the charismatic renewal are not simply optional, personal experiences, or something linked to a particular spirituality or movement, but something essential to integral Christian Initiation, something normative for the whole Church. In their own words:

The energizing power of the Holy Spirit, manifesting itself in a variety of charisms, is not religious fluff. Nor is it as viewed by many today an optional spirituality in the Church such as, among Catholics, devotion to the Sacred Heart or the stations of the cross. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit does not belong to private piety, but, as we have demonstrated, to the public official liturgy of the Church. It is the spirituality of the Church. By that account it is not let it be said clearly the property of the charismatic renewal. The unique gift which the charismatic renewal brings to the Church is the awareness of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is all the more reason why the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not to be identified with any group or movement. . . . Indeed, the Baptism in the Spirit is normative.¹³

While the experience may be normative, it appears to vary in its effects depending on the previous Christian experience of the recipient. Some may wander in from the street with virtually no Christian experience, perhaps even locked in a life of sin, and in the course of a short period come to faith and conversion and experience baptism in the Spirit without even being sacramentally baptized, as happened in the case of Cornelius and his household. People in this situation need a great deal of instruction, formation, and incorporation into the life of the Church in order for this great grace to bear enduring fruit. Some may have been nominal Catholics for many years and never known a truly personal relationship with the Lord when they are baptized in the spirit. Some may have been very knowledgeable and devout Catholics, perhaps with a high degree of theological training, living a life of genuine holiness, and

having a deep involvement in the mission of the Church when they are baptized in the Spirit. All testify to the significance of the change they experienced.

Léon Joseph Cardinal Suenens, for example, was living a very dedicated life and his Episcopal motto was “*in Spiritu sancto*.” And yet he tells of the change that happened in him when he prayed along with others for a greater release of the Holy Spirit in his life.

I did not discover the Holy Spirit through the Renewal. As I have said, the Spirit had long been at the center of my life. . . . I saw how some Christians live, who took the Acts of the Apostles at its word, and this led me to question the depth and the genuineness of my own faith. As a result, I found that I believed in the action of the Holy Spirit, but in a limited sphere; in me the Spirit could not call forth from the organ all the melody he wished; some of the pipes did not function, because they had not been used.¹⁴

*The Second Theological Interpretation:
A Special Sending of the Spirit, Distinct
from Christian Initiation*

A second interpretation of the experience of what has been called baptism in the Spirit was first proposed by Fr. Francis Sullivan in an article he published in *Gregorianum* and later elaborated in a book.¹⁵

While Sullivan acknowledges that the first interpretation is the most widely accepted understanding, and while he does not deny its value, he proposes that baptism in the Spirit may perhaps more appropriately be seen as a distinct sending of the Spirit, apart from Christian initiation, to equip the recipient for a special service or for an important step forward in life with Christ. Sullivan is concerned not to impugn the validity of the sacraments of Christian initiation in any way or cast doubt on their *ex opere operato* character,

and so suggests the possibility of locating what is experienced as baptism of the Spirit in an additional sending of the Spirit rather than an activation of the variably dormant graces of the sacraments of initiation. Sullivan cites St. Thomas Aquinas’s teaching on the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit (in contrast to the visible mission of Pentecost) as a support for his thesis. I will take a closer look at this text later on.

Sullivan suggests that in light of Aquinas’s thought we might want to understand the Pentecostal experience that is most commonly called baptism in the Spirit in an alternative way. He suggests that since every validly baptized Christian has received the Holy Spirit and is therefore baptized in the Spirit, even though the grace may be dormant, it would be best to respect this *ex opere operato* giving of the Spirit by not referring to the contemporary Pentecostal experience as baptism in the Spirit but rather as a renewal in the Spirit, and not necessarily closely linked to baptism and confirmation. “So perhaps the best we can do is to say that what Christians in the ‘charismatic renewal’ are praying for and receiving is a ‘new sending of the Holy Spirit,’ or ‘a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit,’ for their ‘renewal in the Spirit.’”¹⁶ Sullivan would locate what is happening when Christians pray to be baptized in the Spirit more in the context of Acts 4:23–33, where the disciples who have already been baptized in the Spirit on the day of Pentecost are now praying for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit to help them move forward in difficult circumstances, than in the initiatory texts in Acts.

Under this interpretation what is being experienced as baptism in the Spirit can no longer be viewed as normative and essentially connected to the fullness of Christian initiation, but rather as something more limited, unpredictable, and personal. It also lends itself to looking at baptism in the Holy Spirit as a particular spirituality, a charismatic spirituality, one among many.

*The Third Interpretation: An Eschatological Outpouring
for World Evangelization in Light of the Lord's Return*

Without denying the merit of the first two interpretations a third interpretation has emerged, of which Fr. Peter Hocken is the main champion. Hocken postulates that for the first time since the early centuries of the Church the charisms of the Spirit are again being experienced on a global scale far beyond their appearance in Catholic tradition after the first centuries that mainly evidenced these charisms in the lives of canonized saints. Hocken believes that there is a “newness” to the current outpouring of the Spirit that implies an eschatological meaning to this global reappearance of the charisms and that it is connected to the culmination of this age as the Gospel is preached to all nations and the Jewish people again encounter the Lord and turn to Jesus as their Messiah.

Hocken sees the introduction of Jesus by John the Baptist in both Matthew and Luke as the one who will baptize in the Spirit and fire as “linking the outpouring of the Spirit promised for the messianic age and the eschatological judgment.”¹⁷ Being baptized in the Spirit is connected with the final judgment and the final separation of the human race into “wheat” that will be gathered into the “granary” and “chaff” that will be burned with “unquenchable fire.” Rather than seeing the contemporary experience of baptism in the Spirit as just an occasional experience of personal renewal or a sending of the Spirit to enable a new step in an individual’s life or service, or simply a renewal of initiatory graces, Hocken argues for acknowledging the eschatological framework as plainly contained in the first descriptions of baptism in the Spirit by John the Baptist. He also notes that the two texts in Acts that specifically use the phrase “baptize in the Spirit” both refer to events of wide significance, the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies to Israel on the day of Pentecost and the extension of the messianic kingdom to the Gentiles in the household of Cornelius.

He concludes: “Thus, if this eschatological line of thinking is

correct, the meaning of ‘baptized in the Spirit’ today is to be by personal experience part of a new ‘Pentecost’ in the body of Christ, that is (i) being poured out in our day by the Spirit of God in a corporate way and (ii) a particular form of preparing the Church for the coming of the King and the kingdom.”¹⁸

Commentary on the Three Interpretations

THE FIRST INTERPRETATION

There is a reason that the first interpretation is the predominant one of baptism in the Spirit and has been since the first theological books and articles were published on the subject. Without questioning in any way that validly baptized and confirmed persons are Christians and that in some real measure the Spirit has been given to them, it would seem appropriate to say that there is a wide disparity between the fruits of Pentecost manifested in the New Testament and the lack of many of these fruits in the lives of most Catholics today.¹⁹

The Catholic Church’s theology of the sacraments has long had an explanation for such a disparity, although it has seldom been given the attention that it deserves. The Catholic Church firmly teaches that the sacraments of the Church work *ex opere operato*, that is, by the very fact of the action being performed. Aside from some rare circumstances that would make the administration of the sacrament invalid, its validity doesn’t depend on the worthiness of the minister or on the effectiveness of the preparation. Furthermore, it requires only a minimally appropriate disposition on the part of the one who receives the sacrament, or in the case of infant baptism, it requires only the faith of the parents, godparents, and the Church, and the promise that the child will be led to an adult appropriation of the sacramental graces. At the same time, the Church teaches that the actual effectiveness or fruitfulness of the sacrament in the life of an individual is determined to a large extent by these other factors, *ex opere operantis*, and that in fact, the quality of the preparation, the ef-

fectiveness of the minister, the quality of the faith community, and most of all, the disposition and intention of the recipient largely determine what is experienced and effective in the sacramental graces conferred by the sacrament.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them” (1128).

The sense that has most effectively been communicated to the Catholic faithful, it seems, is that the sacraments don’t depend on the worthiness of the minister but work automatically. It doesn’t seem that there has been as effective a communication or implementation in pastoral practice about the extremely important disposition of those who are receiving the sacraments or the quality of the community of faith into which they are being received. Or when the importance of such a disposition is theoretically acknowledged it is seldom effectively implemented in sacramental preparation.

One of the most remarkable treatments of the relevance of the disposition of the recipients in terms of what is actually experienced, effective, or fruitful in the life of the person receiving the sacrament is actually that of Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae*, especially in the *Tertia pars*, (III, qq. 66–71). In these questions, Aquinas details very clearly the obstacles that block the fruitfulness of the sacraments, even when they are validly conferred: lack of faith, understanding, desire to live a new life, or repentance, or the omitting of the exorcisms and allowing demonic influence to block response to baptismal grace. He clearly states that on a given day a number of people may validly receive baptism or confirmation but the fruitfulness of the sacrament may vary considerably; those who want more of the Lord, he teaches, will receive more of the Lord.

The first interpretation claims that the contemporary experience of baptism in the Spirit when experienced by already initi-

ated Christians is actually a renewal or release of the already given Spirit and his gifts, now aroused from dormancy or tepidity by a mini catechesis that includes teaching, prayer and the invitation to faith, repentance and a deeper commitment to the Lord Jesus, and a greater desire for the activation of his gift of the Spirit; and oftentimes contact with communities, prayer groups, or networks of relationships of fervent faith that foster such a renewal and ongoing "life in the Spirit."²⁰ Such preparation must not be thought to guarantee such a renewal. As St. John of the Cross so often says, we can dispose ourselves for the action of God, but it is God who chooses to act. Good preparation for sacramental renewal or fruitfulness is very important, but it is preparation for the action of God.

THE SECOND INTERPRETATION

The second view would claim that while there is merit in understanding baptism in the Spirit as a renewal of the sacraments of Christian initiation, it would be preferable to understand it as a further "mission of the Spirit" as described by Aquinas. This avoids the danger of casting any doubt on the efficacy of Christian initiation. Another strength of this theory is that it recognizes the wide variety of experiences that are being called baptism in the Spirit, some of which indeed may best be understood as further sendings of the Spirit to empower a new phase of ministry or Christian life and not simply a renewal of basic Christian initiation. Drawing from the riches of Aquinas to show us how this understanding of things is embedded in the Catholic tradition is a very positive contribution.

In this regard it is worth noting that there is certainly not a univocal meaning to what people experience in baptism of the Spirit. It is probable that the same was true in the early church. There is certainly a wide variety of experience that depends upon many variables. For some there is a sudden and immediately noticeable change characterized by the numerous fruits already noted in our initial definitions and descriptions. For others there is a gradual emergence of these fruits. For some there is a beginning of a re-

newal that needs to be nurtured to reach its full effect by additional catechesis, prayer, support of a renewed community, and so on. For others, where there was inadequate or defective preparation or intention, there may be little effect. For some there may be an experience of the “additional sending of the Spirit” of which the second interpretation speaks.

In my judgment, when there is at least some measure of adequate preparation and sincerity of intention, what is most commonly experienced when people are baptized in the Spirit is an action of God that brings about a renewal or actualization of the graces of sacramental initiation. It may also happen that the Spirit also gives graces and gifts that contain a call to a particular mission or vocation, such as this interpretation posits.

The great weakness of the second interpretation is that it does not directly address the great disparity between what is described in the New Testament as Christian initiation and its effects and fruits also witnessed in the early centuries of the Church and the extremely common experience of those who have been validly sacramentally initiated but who often have little or no experience of dynamic relationship with Christ and the Father, of depth of prayer, of the Spirit’s moving, or eagerness to be a witness to Christ in the world. It does not squarely face the fact that what most validly initiated Christians experience in this renewal or actualization of baptism and confirmation is something they have never experienced before and simply “brings them up to code,” as it were, with the beginnings of the Christian life as depicted in the New Testament. For most people baptism in the Spirit does not normally launch them from a base of fervent Christian life to a new and higher stage or ministry or special calling; it is the activation of at least some of the basic fruits that the New Testament attributes to Christian initiation.

A further weakness of the second interpretation is that it consigns what appears to be an experience open to everyone with the proper instruction and preparation to the realm of the mysterious and un-

predictable.²¹ I would think the practical consequence of favoring this view would be a great reduction in the number of people experiencing an effective renewal or additional sending of the Holy Spirit. So, in my opinion, there are indeed significant pastoral consequences attached to the interpretation that is primarily adopted, although these considerations cannot in themselves settle questions of truth.

At the same time, as I have noted, Aquinas’s teaching on additional sendings of the Spirit is referenced to support the second interpretation. Although if we take a closer look at this text we can perhaps find support for a basic renewal of grace, the primary focus is on special callings and missions, such as a calling to religious life, martyrdom, or a call to work with the poor. Aquinas’s text provides greater detail.

Mission in its very meaning implies that he who is sent either begins to exist where he was not before, as occurs to creatures; or begins to exist where he was before, but in a new way, in which sense mission is ascribed to the divine persons. Thus, mission as regards the one to whom it is sent implies two things, the indwelling of grace, and a certain renewal by grace. Thus the invisible mission is sent to all in whom are to be found these two conditions [viz., having the indwelling of grace or receiving the renewal by grace] . . . The invisible mission takes place also as regards progress in virtue or increase of grace. . . . Such invisible mission, however, chiefly occurs as regards anyone’s proficiency in the performance of a new act, or in the acquisition of a new state of grace; as, for example, the proficiency in reference to the gift of miracles or of prophecy, or in the fervor of charity leading a man to expose himself to the danger of martyrdom, or to renounce his possessions, or to undertake any arduous work.²²

It might be possible to distinguish in the text three different kinds of invisible missions.²³ One would be a basic renewal of grace, although it is not really clear what he means by this. Another

would be a mission that involves progress in virtue or an increase of grace. However, the third way Aquinas says that this “invisible mission . . . chiefly occurs” is by creating a capacity to act in a new way or the acquisition of a new state of grace. One of the examples that Aquinas gives to illustrate what he means by a “new state of grace” is proficiency (as contrasted perhaps with an occasional experience of or exercise of a charism) in miracles or prophecy (perhaps those who are given a more stable and regular exercise of such gifts such as the diversity of stable leadership gifts [*domata*] indicated in Ephesians 4: 7–11). Another example he gives to illustrate what this most commonly occurring invisible mission could be is the call and gifting to renounce one’s possessions, as perhaps in religious life, or a special infusion of grace to equip one to face martyrdom, or a special infusion of grace to enable one to undertake a specific and difficult task.

As we read the text more closely, it seems that Aquinas may have in mind a wide range of possible actions of the Spirit that he speaks about as invisible missions, only one of which could possibly be understood to be basic to Christian initiation and one that is not sufficiently developed to really be sure of his meaning. The second of the meanings would seem to be growth steps and not basic to Christian initiation. The third of the three meanings clearly seem to be extraordinary giftings and callings clearly not to be classified as basic Christian initiation.

It seems therefore that what Aquinas primarily understands as the most common invisible missions of the Holy Spirit pertain to special callings and not to the renewal of basic Christian initiation. This is not to say that when someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit they may not, along with a basic renewal of the graces of baptism and confirmation, also, at the same time, receive an extraordinary gift or special calling as well, but that would not be the common experience.

While the text that proponents of the second interpretation draw our attention to are relevant to our study, I think that the

texts of Aquinas that I referenced in my comments on the first interpretation from the *Tertia pars* (ST III, qq. 66–71) give clear and convincing reasons why the fruitfulness and effectiveness of the sacraments of Christian initiation can be and often are blocked, and subsequently, can be unblocked. As I have noted, Aquinas points out that lack of faith, lack of authentic repentance, lack of understanding, lack of dealing with demonic activity, lack of desire, and lack of intention and desire to live a new way of life can all block the fruitfulness of the sacraments even when they are validly administered. He teaches that when these defects and blockages are removed the fruitfulness of the sacraments can be released. At the same time he says that what people experience in the fruitfulness of the sacraments varies according to the depth of spiritual desire for the sacramental graces, as well as, of course, on the sovereign action of God.

In the polemical reactions that characterized the Reformation, the Catholic Church tended to emphasize the *ex opere operato* aspect of the sacraments with the result that the great significance of the subjective dispositions of those receiving the sacraments in terms of their realized fruitfulness was often not emphasized sufficiently to effectively shape pastoral practice and understanding.²⁴

Advocates of the second interpretation, using the Scholastic distinctions about types of grace, sometimes also point out that sacramental grace is a specific form of sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*) and is essential to the sacrament, while the charismatic gifts are in a different category (*gratiae gratis datae*)²⁵ and cannot be claimed to be essential to the graces of baptism and confirmation; therefore they must properly be seen as not essentially connected with the sacraments but rather as the effect of an additional “sending” or “mission” of the Spirit. While McDonnell’s work does focus specifically on the charisms and can understandably be read as implying that they are essential to the graces of initiation, the issue, it seems to me, can be satisfactorily resolved even when accepting the distinction between essential and accidental. One of the strongest advocates of Sullivan’s interpretation admits as much:

There is also a second possible answer to the question whether the pentecostal experience is essentially a sacramental grace: a highly qualified “yes.” If the essence of the pentecostal experience is restricted to a general growth in sanctifying grace, which is always rooted to some extent in baptism then there is no difficulty. The charisms, then, would be non-essential manifestations of the growth, or renewal, of baptismal grace. The pentecostal experience as a whole may legitimately be interpreted as a sacramental grace only if the charisms are clearly distinguished as accidental to the experience.²⁶

Even if we grant the strict Scholastic distinctions I do not see a problem of understanding the contemplative graces that are clearly evident in the experience of Pentecost—the profound encounter with the risen, ascended, Spirit-baptizing Lord that evokes praise, joy, and bold witness, the blossoming of virtues and the Scriptures “coming alive,” the desire for prayer as well as Christian fellowship—as essential to baptism in the Spirit and available to everyone. At the same time we can see the “frequent,” “usual” manifestation of the charisms as metaphysically accidental and variably distributed. Everyone in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation receives the same sanctifying grace, although as Aquinas teaches there will be a wide variation in experience and fruitfulness depending on the factors I have several times mentioned. The renewal of these graces of Christian initiation, of sanctifying grace, would then be the same in type but variable in effectiveness and fruitfulness, depending, again, on multiple factors. The manifestation of charisms would not be the same in each person but would be variable depending not just on the disposition of the individual but on the Spirit’s distribution of particular graces and gifts. “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. . . . But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes” (1 Cor 12: 4–11). We can even accept these variable charismatic graces as metaphysically accidental and instances of additional missions or sendings of the Spirit, while

at the same time holding that the core graces (including the Isaiah 11 gifts) are the sacramental graces of initiation being renewed or released.²⁷

Yet even though the charisms may be viewed as metaphysically accidental, they are nevertheless normal, important, and pastorally useful,²⁸ and Paul says that we should “strive eagerly for the spiritual gifts” (1 Cor 14:1). I recall once again John Paul’s appeal to all Christians: “Open yourselves docilely to the gifts of the Spirit! Accept gratefully and obediently the charisms which the Spirit never ceases to bestow on us!”²⁹

THE THIRD INTERPRETATION

This third reading helpfully draws our attention to the manifestly eschatological framework that the Scripture gives to being baptized in the Holy Spirit and reminds us of the “biblical worldview” that frames the gospel with the Day of the Lord and its definitive judgment and separation of the human race into the saved and the condemned. This interpretation highlights the urgency of evangelization. It doesn’t claim to be a totally adequate interpretation on its own and, indeed, cannot be considered to be one. Whether particular speculation about current events concerning the nation of Israel or the “mass apostasy” or the “removal of the restraint on evil” or the worldwide preaching of the gospel indeed are present signs that indicate we are entering into the last of the last days, only time will tell.

While there may be a particular contemporary eschatological significance (in addition to its scriptural framework) to the global experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit that began at the beginning of the twentieth century—an irreducible newness and not just a renewal—there are other explanations that are more certain. It would seem that the reading that John Paul gave on the “signs of the times” in *Novo millennio ineunte* is sufficient explanation without resorting to more speculative eschatology. The collapse of Christendom in our lifetime has shaken the Church to

its core and is forcing a reconsideration about the true source of the Church's power as it is being embarrassingly stripped in many countries of political influence and material affluence and moral failings and hypocrisy are uncovered. A new evangelization is obviously needed—and how can such an evangelization ever happen unless we recover the secret of the early church's enthusiasm, joy, willingness to sacrifice, and passion to proclaim Christ that has now been identified by four popes as the power of Pentecost, which is biblically understood as being baptized in the Spirit?

For those who find it difficult to accept that the experience of Pentecost is supposed to be normative, as the first interpretation posits, because of the observation that so many centuries have gone by with so little experience of such widespread workings of the Spirit, this understanding may prove helpful. In this light we can say that this is not just a renewal but something new indeed. The Spirit is restoring aspects of his working in response to the collapse of Christendom, the rise of an international pagan culture, and the current needs of the Church.

Conclusions

In my judgment the interpretation that most adequately explains what most people experience when they are baptized in the Spirit is the first interpretation, a release or renewal or actualization of the graces given in baptism and confirmation that have hitherto remained dormant for any of the reasons that Aquinas gives. I would also suggest that a careful study of the numerous testimonies that have been collected, published, and summarized over the years about what people experience when they are baptized in the Spirit would bear this out. These testimonies most commonly reflect the picture of fully initiated Christians that we find in the New Testament, and not special callings or vocations.³⁰ This is not to say that there are not some who when they are baptized in the Spirit are also in effect experiencing an additional sending of the Spirit, as the

second interpretation postulates, to equip or empower them for a specific mission or a new level of life with Christ, or the activation or conferring of a particular charism, distinct from the normal Christian life depicted in the New Testament accounts.

The third interpretation recognizes the essentially eschatological nature of baptism in the Holy Spirit as presented in the Scripture, and also recognizes the specific eschatological signs of the times. But while valid, this has to be understood as speculation.

While all three interpretations add something to our understanding of what may be happening in the baptism of the Spirit and provide conceptual tools for further thought, I think it is clear that the first interpretation is closest to the mark. Furthermore, as indicated above, the texts of Aquinas on the fruitfulness of the sacraments provide a theological resource for further understanding of what this renewal or actualization of sacramental grace actually is that is more useful for understanding the contemporary significance of baptism in the Spirit than Aquinas’s teaching on the additional invisible missions of the Spirit that is cited as the basis for the second interpretation, although both sets of texts are illuminating. Aquinas’s teaching provides strong support for the view that the sacraments of Christian initiation can be validly received yet remain spiritually unfruitful. It also provides strong support for the view that those who have received the sacraments of Christian initiation “unfruitfully” can later experience their effectiveness when obstacles to the sacramental grace being effective are removed. Aquinas also makes clear that there can be a wide range of spiritual experience and effectiveness among those validly initiated depending on the depth of desire, devotion, and understanding that exists among the initiated.

It therefore seems clear that Aquinas’s teaching provides solid theological foundations for the view that the contemporary experience of baptism in the Spirit is, at least in most cases, a genuine release of the sacramental graces that have remained dormant, ineffective, or limited in their effect because of defects of understanding, will, desire, and so on. What is happening then in the contem-

porary situation can be understood as the increase of understanding, desire, repentance, and faith that happens in many through contact with renewed Christians, through the instruction that often precedes prayer for baptism in the Holy Spirit, and through the witness and testimony of those who have experienced such a renewal, as well as through the witness of prayer groups and communities that manifest such renewal.³¹

At the same time, as Sullivan has argued, it can be acknowledged that some of those who are baptized in the Spirit (per the second interpretation) have already experienced the fruitfulness of their sacramental graces of initiation, perhaps in a gradual process of growth over the years, and that what they are experiencing can perhaps most accurately be called a “new mission” or “sending” or “commissioning” the release of some grace or charism that impels the recipient toward a deeper relationship or new or enhanced service in the body of Christ.

As almost 1,700 years of Christendom collapse and a new international pagan culture gains ascendancy, even rising to the “dictatorship of relativism” that Benedict warns us about, the Church in the West is encountering circumstances that are more like those encountered by the early church than anything we have known in our lifetimes. The recent and consistent papal calls for a new Pentecost, as perhaps the deepest need of the Church today, surely can be advanced by a deeper theological understanding of what many millions have experienced as baptism in the Holy Spirit.

And yet as McDonnell, a strong proponent of the first interpretation has graciously and wisely said: “Whether the release of the Spirit is due to an awakening of sacramental grace or merely the fruit of prayer, the important thing is that it *happen*.”³²

Notes

1. Stanislaw Rylko, “The Event of 30 May 1998 and its Ecclesiological and Pastoral Consequences for the Life of the Church,” in *The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council of the Laity, 2000), 45.
2. There has been an ongoing discussion about what is the most appropriate terminology to use in describing this experience. The primary purpose of this article is not to enter into the discussion of terminology, although such a discussion is relevant, but rather to explore the ways in which the substance of this experience has been theologically understood. In this article I will use what is still the most common way of referring to this experience in North America, which is “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”
3. Fr. Francis Sullivan, SJ, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”: A Catholic Interpretation of the Pentecostal Experience,” *Gregorianum* 55, no. 1 (1974): 49–68. Many of the books cited below contain both testimonies of the effects of being baptized in the Spirit by those who have experienced such, as well as theological summaries of the effects. The testimonies and the theological summaries are remarkably similar. It is worth noting that many of the theologians writing on the issue of baptism of the Spirit, such as Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa and Léon Joseph Cardinal Suenens, were living devout and very dedicated Catholic lives and yet still testify to a significant “turning point” when they prayed for a renewal of their baptism in the Spirit, understood as the graces of Christian initiation. Cf. Raniero Cantalamessa, *Sober Intoxication of the Spirit: Filled with the Fullness of God*, trans. Marsha Daigle-Williamson (Cincinnati: Servant/St. Anthony, 2005) and Léon Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *A New Pentecost?* trans. Francis Martin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).
4. Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, *Catholic Pentecostals* (New York: Paulist, 1969), 151.
5. These statistics are compiled by the pontifically approved international organization that serves the renewal, the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services with offices in the Vatican (www.iccrs.org). See also Peter Hocken, “The Impact of the Charismatic Movement on the Roman Catholic Church,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 25, no. 2 (August 2004): 205–16.
6. David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). In 1996, W. J. Hollwenweger in an article published in *Concilium* 3 (1996): 3–14, claimed that such growth was unprecedented in Christian history: “A growth from zero to four hundred million in ninety years has never before been experienced in the entire history of the Church.”
7. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete in domino* (On Christian Joy), May 9, 1975, chap. 7. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19750509_gaudete-in-domino_en.html (accessed November 3, 2009).
8. *L'Observatore Romano*, English Language Edition, June 3, 1998, “This is the day the Lord has made! Holy Father holds historic meeting with ecclesial movements and

- new communities,” 1–2. Also available as an Appendix in a document published by *Pontificium Consilium Pro Laicis* as part of their Laity Today Series: *Movements in the Church: Proceedings of the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements*, Rome, 27–29 May 1998 (Vatican City, 1999).
9. Benedict XVI, “Let Baptism of the Holy Spirit purify every heart,” May 11, 2008, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, May 14, 2008, No. 20, 1.
 10. Two of the earliest studies are those of the Ranaghans (see n. 4 above) and Fr. Edward O’Connor, CSC, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 1971), who hold the view I refer to as the first interpretation. This is also the interpretation of cardinals Suenens and Cordes, as well as Fr. Cantalamessa. Cf. Paul Josef Cordes, *Call to Holiness: Reflections on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997). A variation of this view ties baptism in the Holy Spirit particularly to the initiatory sacrament of confirmation. See Steve Clark, *Baptized in the Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Pecos, NM: Dove, 1976) and *Confirmation and the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit”* (Pecos, NM: Dove, 1969). Clark’s preference for linking baptism in the Spirit to confirmation is to preserve the properly “Pentecostal” nature of baptism of the Spirit, lest it be mistaken for just any deepening of relationship with Christ or conversion that doesn’t include the experiential dimension of the Spirit’s presence and some charismatic manifestation. Clark makes a strong case that speaking in tongues is a normal and most common manifestation, but acknowledges that “inspired praise” whether in “tongues” or in one’s own language is all that can be certainly determined from the various accounts of the charismatic manifestations accompanying Christian initiation described in the New Testament (*Baptized in the Spirit*, 35–36).
 11. Patti Gallagher Mansfield, *As By a New Pentecost: The Dramatic Beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, rev. ed. (Stonyhurst, Lancashire: Proclaim Publications, 1992), 2.
 12. For a short summary of this review, see Killian McDonnell and George T. Montague, ed., *Fanning the Flame: What Does Baptism in the Holy Spirit Have to Do with Christian Initiation?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 16–18.
 13. Killian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 337.
 14. Léon Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *A New Pentecost?* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 212–27.
 15. Another strong proponent of the approach taken by Sullivan is Fr. Norbert Baumert, SJ, who has published books and articles supporting this viewpoint and was a main advisor to the German bishops’ statement on the charismatic renewal. Norbert Baumert, “‘Charism’ and ‘Spirit-Baptism’: Presentation of an Analysis,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12, no. 2 (April 2004): 147–79. Baumert argues explicitly against the position of McDonnell and Montague claiming that baptism in the Holy Spirit is not normative and not connected to the sacraments of initiation but rather

- a "special grace." See also Fr. Peter Hocken's sympathetic but critical response to Baumert's article where he propounds his own eschatological interpretation of Spirit Baptism. Peter Hocken, "Baptized in Spirit An Eschatological Concept: A Response to Norbert Baumert and His Interlocutors," *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 13, no. 2 (2005): 257–68. John Joy also very ably argues in support of Sullivan's position in his article, "The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal: Theological Interpretation of the Experience," in *Antiphon* 9, no. 2 (2005): 141–65.
16. Sullivan, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit," 66.
 17. Peter Hocken, "Baptized in Spirit: An Eschatological Concept," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 2 (2005): 257–68.
 18. *Ibid.*, 267.
 19. The Catherine of Siena Institute on the basis of extensive interviews with pastors in English-speaking countries estimate that no more than 15 percent of Catholics are living a life that the New Testament would describe as characteristic of "disciples." See www.siena.org. Avery Cardinal Dulles cites statistics gathered by Nancy Ammerman in her book, *Pillars of Faith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 117, 134, to illustrate how little evangelization is a reality among Catholic parishes. "Asked whether spreading the faith was a high priority of their parishes, 75 percent of conservative Protestant congregations and 57 percent of African American congregations responded affirmatively, whereas only 6 percent of Catholic parishes did the same. Asked whether they sponsored local evangelistic activities, 39 percent of conservative Protestant congregations and 16 percent of African American congregations responded positively as compared with only 3 percent of Catholic parishes." Cited by Cardinal Dulles in his foreword to Timothy E. Byerley's *The Great Commission* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), ix.
 20. One of the great gifts of the charismatic renewal movement is the discovery of a simple way of actually helping people prepare for and pray effectively to be baptized in the Spirit. The widely used *Life in the Spirit Seminar* in various editions and variations is most commonly a seven-week, once-a-week session, that helps participants grasp clearly and appropriately the basic *kerygma* and prepare prayerfully for acts of repentance, commitment to Christ, renunciation of evil spiritual influences, and desire for "more of the Holy Spirit" that have effectively helped countless millions of Catholics experience a "personal Pentecost." The sessions comprise something like a mini-RCIA for already baptized and confirmed adults, combining elements of clear teaching, prayer, and invitation to significant personal response. An actual "pastoral methodology" that is effective in helping people appropriate the graces of Christian initiation is often a missing piece in calls for renewal. The *Life in the Spirit Seminar* can be utilized in various contexts apart from the structures of a particular movement. At the same time, as noted above, such preparation is only that: preparation for an action that only God can perform, the touch of his Spirit.

21. Montague and McDonnell suggest as much when they make the distinction between private piety (second interpretation) and public liturgy (first interpretation).
22. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (ST) I, q. 43, a. 6.
23. Aquinas's treatment of the missions of the Son and the Spirit is complex and is more extensive than is possible to consider (or than is strictly relevant) to the issue we are looking at.
24. For a balanced treatment of this see the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1128.
25. Aquinas's treatment of sanctifying grace and the charisms is contained in ST I–II, q. 111, a. 1; II–II, qq. 171–78. Fr. Edward O'Connor devotes considerable attention to relating the charismatic experience to the traditional doctrine on the spiritual life. *Pentecostal Movement*, 179–219. See also my article: Ralph Martin, "Charismatic and Contemplative: What Would John of the Cross Say?" available at www.renewalministries.net.
26. Joy, "Outpouring of the Holy Spirit," 154.
27. The "seven gifts of the Spirit" received at baptism and strengthened in confirmation are understood to be scripturally grounded in Isaiah 11:2–3: "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord."
28. There are scripture scholars and theologians, of course, who might argue that while any particular charism given in conjunction with Christian initiation is accidental the giving of at least some charism is not accidental but integral to the giving of the Spirit. Whether this would be to use the word "accidental" in the same sense would require a longer discussion. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa examines the complex history of the classification of sanctifying and charismatic gifts of the Spirit in his book, *Come, Creator Spirit* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 171–90.
29. "This is the day the Lord has made!"
30. A detailed study of the "effects and fruits" of Christian initiation in the New Testament based not only on the initiation texts but derived also from the "culture of Pentecost" as it is revealed throughout the epistles would need to be done as a basis for drawing conclusions on this point. At the same time an analysis of the collections of testimonies on the range of changes experienced by people who have been prayed with to be baptized in the Spirit would be necessary as a point of comparison. Attention would have to be paid to whether the testimonies are truly representative of the range of experiences. McDonnell draws some preliminary conclusions: "Is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as experienced in the charismatic renewal today equivalent to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as described in the New Testament and in the post-biblical tradition we have examined? While we would hesitate to claim an exact equation of the two, if we go by the descriptions found throughout the documents here examined, the number of parallels is impressive." McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation*, 341.

31. This article is purposely limited in its scope, focusing on the theological meaning of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The context in which baptism in the Spirit is most commonly experienced involves some contact with a prayer group, renewal center, or community. The role of such relationship structures is an important one but is beyond the scope of this article.
32. McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation*, 339.