

FAITH AND EXPERIENCE I

The Problems of Catholic Pentecostalism

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Several recent publications¹ focus on the question of religious experience; two of them are particularly devoted to wooing the reader to share the experience of the Catholic 'charismatic movement', three of them represent the first published results to emerge from the work of the Religious Experience Research Unit founded in Oxford by Sir Alister Hardy. Since the problems raised by them overlap to some extent, it seems worth while to treat all five books together in a series of articles.

For all its deceptively quiet style, *This Promise is for You* brings to light the tensions inherent in what we may call the 'benign' wing of Catholic Pentecostalism. There are those who are prepared to state fairly bluntly that Catholic Pentecostalism is something quite new, and that it shows up traditional piety as being, basically, ineffective, and this no doubt corresponds to the experience of the pioneers of Catholic, as of other brands of, Pentecostalism. There are occasional hints of this in Abbot Parry's book, especially on p. 100, where he warns the reader (who is invited to use the book as a course of preparation for 'baptism in the Spirit') that "we are on the brink of changing a tangible, familiar, realistic, 'normal' life style, for an act of faith in an unseen God". This is the kind of language we should associate with those who treat a conversion to the 'charismatic movement' as being, for practical purposes, a man's first serious conversion to Christ (which of course it may be in some cases).

But on the whole Parry is concerned to re-assure the reader that the 'charismatic movement' is very much in line with traditional piety, that there are no distinctively 'charismatic' virtues, that it is not particularly about 'odd' manifestations, that 'baptism in the Spirit' may be a gradual process, not a sudden experience, that none of it depends on going to any special kind of prayer meeting, and so on. The continuity with ordinary christian life is stressed rather than the discontinuity.

¹ *This Promise is for You*, by David Parry OSB. DLT 1977. pp. 147 £1.95
A Charismatic Theology, by Heribert Mühlen. Burns & Oates 1978. pp. 360 £4.95
The Original Vision, by Edward Robinson; *A Sense of Presence*, by Timothy Beardsworth; *This Time-Bound Ladder*, ed. Edward Robinson. The Religious Experience Research Unit, Oxford. 1977. £2.00 each.

But then it is not really clear why the discontinuity has to be brought in at all. The fifty days' worth of meditations are designed to prepare the reader for "the reception of a great grace" and "a new commitment to the following of Christ"; but surely any retreat is designed to do that. Why, then, is the fruit of this particular exercise said to be, evidently in some strong sense, "definitive"? If we are not obliged to speak in tongues, or prophesy, or go to prayer meetings, or heal the sick, or do any 'odd' things, but only to live more consciously and deliberately by the power of the Holy Spirit, what is so peculiarly 'charismatic' about that? Why is the desired result of this particular course of meditations "*the* release of the Spirit", and not just one advance among many in a whole lifetime of increasing conversion to God? And even if we are being invited to come into a greater expectation that a greater diversity of spiritual gifts will be operative in or around us, it is still not clear to me why this has to involve the 'charismatic movement'. If the 'charismatic movement' is serious in its claim to be seeking a revitalization of the whole church, and that not just by absorbing the whole church into itself, is it not perhaps time for it to show some readiness to preach its gospel in more ordinary christian terms, and forgo its jargon with its inevitable nuance of peculiarity?

Professor Mühlen seems to accept this challenge. He offers us a very serious account of what it is to be a christian and to belong to the church, in which the lessons of Pentecostalism are meant to be fully integrated into a whole ecclesiology and soteriology. I shall return to this attempt in my second article.

All the same, his book does show signs of a continuing tension between the charismatically peculiar and the merely christian. He is more insistent than Parry that certain specific practices are essential to charismatic renewal, but he still wants to treat them all as being aspects of what he calls the "basic christian experience" (die christliche Grunderfahrung). In fact the German title of the book is *Einübung in die christliche Grunderfahrung*. And the author specifically denies that there is any such thing as a new "charismatic theology" (a fact evidently overlooked by whoever devised the English title!). But since he recognizes the need not to make the specific forms of Pentecostalism binding on all Catholics, he is trapped into saying that "the initiation into the basic christian experience does not claim to be the *sole* way to the living parish" (p. 17), which is, on the face of it, absurd. How could there be a living parish which was not initiated into the basic christian experience (assuming, for the moment, that such talk is appropriate at all)?

If the practices and ideas of the 'charismatic movement' are to be absorbed back into the general theory of the christian life, then it becomes much less clear that the movement can be presented (as

it is by Abbot Parry) as a special effusion of the Holy Spirit for our time. The most we could claim (and it would not be an insignificant claim) would be that it represents a truly graced interaction between the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the church (a presence which is always, in some sense, 'new') and the particular circumstances of our time.

An appreciation of this would, in my estimation, be beneficial in two ways. First, it would allow the 'movement' to present itself and evaluate itself in a more humble and sophisticated way. At present there seems hardly any possibility of conversation between the 'charismatics', presenting their spirituality as a special gift of God to the twentieth century, and the sociologists and psychologists (and others) who see it much more as an interesting and fairly typical manifestation of the twentieth century (a gift of the twentieth century to God, if you like). This latter interpretation need not be taken, necessarily, as debunking anything. If grace builds on nature, and nature is not static, but allows for a high degree of varying cultural determination, then inevitably the workings of grace are going to be different in different times and places. This is why there are different fashions in spirituality, as there are in hats.

The importance of seeing spiritual trends as 'fashions' is that it obliges us to recognize the ambiguities inherent in them—and to recognize an ambiguity is quite different from condemning something out of hand. Take healing, for instance: the peculiar combination of circumstances in which we live made it almost inevitable that there would be a healing movement in the churches, to match the plethora of paramedical healing techniques and cults which surround us. Such a movement is not illegitimate in itself, because the command to heal the sick is prominent in the gospels. But it is useful to realize that there is also non-evangelical motivation at work.

Similarly ours is an age in which people have too many options open to them and too few guidelines to help them choose. No wonder they turn so readily to astrology or I Ching or spiritual direction, generally from the East—or to 'divine guidance', which is, after all, a concept easily found in scripture and in the church's tradition.

If this is the material God has to work on in the twentieth century, we should expect him to work, to some extent, accordingly. If the 'charismatic movement' is to be called an 'act of God', I should prefer to see it as a concession to our time, a readiness to play the game on our terms, not as a simple expression of God's primary will. The recognition of this would permit both partisans and critics of the 'charismatic movement' to acknowledge the real elements of divine grace at work in it, and acknowledge them as being not accidental or peripheral to it, while at the same time

allowing for a true appraisal of the abundant evidence of warped and immature motivation as being also integral to the manifestations of the movement.

Secondly, if we can shift the argument away from the claim that the whole thing represents a special outpouring of grace, we can then treat its spirituality more historically and objectively, in terms of the currents and controversies evident throughout the history of the church, without having to defend ourselves against a charge of resisting the Spirit (or the march of progress) if we opt against 'charismatic' spirituality on certain issues. It all becomes open to theological argument like anything else that is not *de fide*.

One very important and difficult question raised by Parry's book is to do with "singleness of heart", a vital theme of Jewish and early christian spirituality (see J. Amstutz: *HAPLOTES*: Rome, 1968). According to Parry, "the release of the Spirit enables us to turn to God with an undivided heart" (p. 103). He does not specify what he understands by "an undivided heart", and conceivably he means much less than the total dissociation from the root of sin in the heart, whose extirpation is so important, for instance, in the Macarian homilies. But he does propound a strong doctrine of the possibility of all our evil habits being rooted out by the Holy Spirit, if only we will believe he can do it (pp. 88-90).

The crucial question is: how and when do we expect the Holy Spirit to eradicate all our bad habits and eliminate our bondage to sinful compulsions? On this there are at least three positions that can be documented. One is to assert that it is only at the very end that the evil impulse, the deceitful spirit, will be slain and our hearts purified by the Holy Spirit (this is the position of Qumran and the Letter of Barnabas, for instance). On this view it is unrealistic to expect ethical perfection here and now, at least in the sense of wholeness of heart; the important thing is not to despair or to "go to sleep in our sins" (Barnabas), but to keep on trying and hoping, in spite of repeated failures (this is admirably expressed in some of the traditions of the Desert Fathers and also in Julian of Norwich; I cite several important texts in Appendix V of my forthcoming book, *The Way of the Preacher*). This is, it seems, incompatible with Parry's view, but it accords well with experience and is pastorally effective, in that it provides a way forward for those who find themselves helpless before some of their habits, in spite of prolonged moral effort and persistent prayer, a way forward which neither encourages despair by holding out hopes that prove deceptive, nor encourages slackness by simply endorsing the status quo. It also accords excellently with St Irenaeus' brilliant demonstration that original sin is, or involves, a sin against time, a sin of being in too much of a hurry to arrive at perfection: man is meant to travel and even to travel slowly, and if he is too impatient to wait, he commits the only really disastrous sin of tak-

ing himself “out of the hands of the Creator”.

Alternatively, it is possible to assert that, in principle, sin is eradicated totally by baptism. This is the view defended by Mark the Monk against the Messalians, and has behind it the primitive tradition that Christ has slain the evil impulse (cf. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 123). Parry’s language about “only believing” is strongly reminiscent of Mark, who says that when we were baptized God gave us everything; in so far as we believe that, we will find ourselves in fact free to live by his law, without any but the slightest internal tension. This is also, basically, the view of St Gregory of Nyssa. It is evident that a spirituality of “release of the Spirit” goes well with this belief (the comparable Byzantine doctrine of “discovery of the Spirit” is, in fact, historically linked with the writings of Mark the Monk): the gift is given in baptism, but, in Parry’s words, it lies there “like a gift still inside its wrapper”. Francis Sullivan has argued well against such a view of the Spirit, that it treats him as a kind of commodity that can be stored away (Gregorianum, 1974). Even more important is the question whether we can properly talk of “releasing the Spirit” unless we are prepared to talk also of binding the Spirit, which would be hard to reconcile with John 3:8. It is traditional enough to talk of grieving the Spirit, even of cramping the Spirit (Hermas)—only in the latter case we are warned that the Spirit will go away, if he finds himself too hemmed in to be comfortable, he will not just wait there for happier days to dawn!

Of course, this is related to the whole vexed question of sufficient and efficacious grace. In that controversy the Molinists basically treated grace as something that God gives to us for us to make use of or not as we please, while the Thomists insisted that our use of grace is itself a work of grace. The difficulty in the Molinist position, as in that of Mark and Gregory, is that it essentially makes our growth dependent on us: God has given us all we need, it is now up to us to respond to it. It is probably pertinent to recall here F. D. Bruner’s complaint that the Pentecostals effectively cancel out their belief in justification by faith, by making faith itself into a work. In the Messalian controversy, which was not influenced by the Western debate provoked by Pelagius (though inevitably Jerome accused the Messalians of Pelagianism), it is noticeable that Gregory of Nyssa shies away from Macarius’ talk of the Spirit growing in us, substituting a reference to *us* growing: the onus is deliberately shifted off God and on to us. (We can make a fairly detailed comparison of the position of Gregory with that of Macarius, since Gregory ‘edited’ the *Epistula Magna* of Macarius in his *De Instituto Christiano*).

Thirdly, it is possible to maintain that baptism gives us a new beginning, a new possibility of perfection, but does not give perfection. That is the real gift of the Spirit, but it comes later. The

difference between this position and the first one I mentioned is that the first is strictly eschatological, while the third maintains that it is, in principle, realistic to hope that there can be even in this life such an imparting of the Spirit that the very root of sin is eliminated.

On this view, the result of baptism is that, whereas previously sin reigned unchallenged in our hearts, there are now two forces at work in us, making it possible for us to experience our sins as alien and hostile, even though we may be unable to rid ourselves of them; this makes us cry out to God to deliver us, and do all that we can to live as if we had the purity of heart we long for. But we must wait for God to act—and it will be a new act each time—to eliminate the roots of sin in us. Only after a long struggle, whose essential weapons are prayer and desire, can most of us expect to be entirely free of all bondage to sin. Then we shall suddenly find ourselves transformed into wholeness, and receive the full gift of the Holy Spirit, with prophetic and visionary powers. This is the position of the Macarian homilies, and it was taken up by Wesley (who records in his Journal that he “read Macarius and sang”); the Holiness Movements adopted a similar position, calling the gift of entire sanctification “baptism in the Holy Spirit”. Pentecostals are divided as to whether “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is identical with or prior to entire sanctification.

This suggests that the Catholic attempt to treat “baptism in the Spirit” as being indifferently a new effusion of the Spirit or a “release of the Spirit” rather confuses the issue. If everything is given already, waiting only to be released, then there is something *wrong* if a Christian finds himself still a prey to sinful compulsions or depression or whatever (and the moralistic tone which follows from this is, I fear, sadly characteristic of much Catholic spirituality, not only that of the ‘charismatics’). But if we are waiting for a new gift and a new act of God, then, though there is something ‘wrong’, obviously, in our painful condition, it is not wrong simply through our fault, it is not wrong in the sense that it could be otherwise, so we can wait with eager hope and without self-recrimination. In fact, the tension between the new man and the old is one of the essential signs of life.

Catholic Pentecostalism has added a further confusion to this, by detaching ‘baptism in the Spirit’ from any immediately verifiable manifestation (such as tongues). As I have already suggested, they have taken over what was originally a theological explanation (the doctrine of ‘baptism in the Spirit’) of a phenomenon (tongues), dropped the phenomenon (tongues) and then reified the explanation (‘baptism in the Spirit’) (cf my article in *Theological Renewal* No. 7, p. 9). In Parry there is real unclarity because of this. “Sometimes people ask for the release of the Spirit and apparently it does not happen. This may be an invitation to examine themselves

anew to see if there are hidden resentments, unforgiving sentiments . . .” (pp. 94-5). This implies that, in principle, one can tell whether or not ‘the release’ has taken place; if it has not, it may be our fault. But elsewhere it is stated that there may be no initial consciousness of ‘baptism in the Spirit’ at all; it may result only in a gradual process of revitalization, which will only become apparent later (pp. 57-8). From Parry’s language in both passages it seems that although ‘baptism in the Spirit’ is claimed to bring about the “experienced fulfilment” of the sacraments (p. 57), it is in fact being itself assimilated to the sacraments: it is, in itself, an invisible imparting of grace, which will become conscious and manifest in due course, not least when we have cleared away any obstacles of sin. Thus if ‘baptism in the Spirit’ is ‘the release of the Spirit’, it appears that the release has itself to be released! If, on the other hand, it is a new effusion of the Spirit, then it is unclear quite what grounds are alleged for belief in its occurrence—presumably it would have to be something like “I did the Life in the Spirit seminars and was prayed over”. An extra sacrament, in fact. It would seem preferable, following St Thomas and the original Pentecostals, to wait until something has actually happened before talking about an effusion of the Holy Spirit.

But this brings us back to the question what exactly it is that we are expecting to happen. Again there is confusion evident in Catholic Pentecostalism.

There are several different possibilities which must be distinguished. We might look for the extirpation of every root of sin in us. That would indeed be worth calling an effusion of the Spirit! But—as Macarius warns us—we should be very hesitant before claiming that this has actually happened. The devil can deceive us into thinking he is defeated, when he is merely having a tea-break. It may be—in fact, I believe it is—theologically important to stress that this is the goal of the ascetic life (whether or not we can believe it to be, in principle, attainable in this life). But it is, in practice, rash to try to judge whether or not it has come about in any particular case. For all practical purposes (and Macarius, unlike the fully-fledged Messalians, is aware of this), the aspiration towards the full gift of the Holy Spirit is an aspiration towards an ever-receding ideal of perfection.

Or we may enthusiastically greet as evidence of an effusion of the Spirit the cessation of a particular moral or psychological problem. Once again it is not always easy to be sure that the problem has really gone, but it is at least sometimes reasonable to claim that it has. And it is quite legitimate to regard this as indicating an act of God. But since this must, presumably, happen many times before all our problems are solved, there would seem to be no grounds for referring to any such occurrence as *the* gift of the Spirit.

An alternative which ought to be mentioned, though it is not one which arises naturally in an encounter with Pentecostalism, is the possibility of a decisive breakthrough in understanding being regarded as the most significant evidence of an effusion of the Spirit. It is perhaps something like this that a more intellectualist mysticism might wish to retain from St Teresa's distinction between those who "have the Spirit" and those who do not.

Finally we might, with the original Pentecostals, look for something specifically 'charismatic', like tongues, to occur. I find it odd that Catholic 'charismatics' like Parry tend to be embarrassed by this possibility. (Mühlen's position is too complex to discuss at this point). For here there really is something new, surely, in christian spirituality, or at least in the theory of christian spirituality. It is something very typical of the twentieth century, but, in my opinion, it is something valuable; not exactly God's gift to us, but, to speak inexactly, not a bad gift for us to offer to God for him to use for our good.

There are two things involved here. First, if for the moment we accept the classic definition of charisms as graces given to us for the sake of others, then the belief that a grace which is essentially ministerial could be decisive in our own spiritual growth fits well with the new awareness in the church that ministry can itself be a means of sanctification.

But, far more important—for it is, after all, generally not 'charisms' that go with 'baptism in the Spirit', in its Pentecostal setting, but glossolalia—speaking in tongues, as a gift evidently not directly related to sanctification, yet equally evidently not really a ministerial gift, seems not to fit into either of the traditional categories of grace. Yet it is being claimed as a major point of spiritual breakthrough.

Now if we can, for the moment, abstract from all the clutter of supernatural interpretation that surrounds the subject, it is surely not difficult to relate speaking in tongues to a variety of natural behavioural patterns. There is, for instance, the common habit of singing more or less wordlessly (in the bath, as well as in moments of high emotion), or just making noises (a pleasure, I am told, particularly appreciated by Scandinavian peoples); there is the rather more dramatic practice of Primal Screaming advocated by Dr Janov; there is the common experience of babies and their fans; there is the use of unintelligible mantras, as taught by the Maharishi, and the practice of unpremeditated rhythmic bodily movement, as used in relaxation courses and anthroposophy. These are all obviously different phenomena and different from glossolalia; but they have in common a certain lessening or even lack of conscious mental control, with a proportionate increase of influence, if not domination, by the subconscious. And this is considered to be a perfectly healthy if not actually health-inducing process.

Now it is not a new idea that a certain natural foundation for a spiritual life is desirable. The Greek fathers believed that 'natural contemplation' (i.e. contemplation of creatures) precedes and to some extent conditions 'theological contemplation'; Origen thought it necessary to crack the tyranny of ideological systems before the mind could respond to scripture; Tertullian appealed to the *anima naturaliter christiana* as having an instinct for the gospel which was obscured by culture and education. But perhaps we are more conscious now than the church has been for some time past that the root of our spiritual problems may very well not be 'spiritual' at all. This is why people are turning to things like yoga and relaxation courses and finding their spiritual lives all the better for it.

It has been suggested before now that Pentecostalism is most significantly viewed as a rediscovery of natural religion and natural modes of expression. Could it not be that a very important gift of the Spirit to us (though I would hesitate to call it *the* gift of the Spirit) is precisely the gift of at least a beginning of reconciliation with our own nature? And could not tongues be a very apt expression or even method of such a gift?

Is it not possible that we have in glossolalia a new (and obviously not the only) application of the old principle that to know God (or anything else, for that matter), you must also and probably first know yourself, and know yourself by being yourself, with an intrinsic and holistic, not an extrinsic analytic knowledge?

Here we would have something which could well be described as an act of God, which would involve a transformation of experience, which could in many cases be traced back to an initial, decisive, experience, which would be initiatory, without in any way appearing to compete with the initiatory events of baptism and confirmation. It would not, of course, resolve the dilemma about whether or not we should expect a complete rooting out of sinful tendencies in this life, or the dilemma as to whether in principle we could be and should be perfect as soon as we are baptized. Nor would it really justify talk of 'baptism in the Spirit'. It would certainly not support any claim that the 'charismatic movement' is a special gift of God for our time, much less that it is *the* way of renewal for the church ("the renewal" is a particularly unfortunate way of circumventing the original "Catholic Pentecostalism"). But it would give us an important instance of a major element in spiritual growth.

This lengthy analysis has led us a long way from Abbot Parry and his book. But the essential issues we have been considering are those raised by his book. Are we to adopt a spirituality of "release of the Spirit"? If so, then clearly a process of self-conversion is needed, to make God's grace effective in us. This is quite a respectable option in the church, but a Dominican cannot help but point

out that it is not the only option, and may be permitted to comment that it is unclear how it is to be prevented from yielding a rather anxious pursuit of self-perfection and a harvest of self-recrimination, if not despair (or self-deception) in case of failure.

Or are we to prefer a spirituality of “effusion of the Spirit”? In that case, what is to count as such an effusion? A certain ritual procedure? That will lead us back to essentially the same problem as the doctrine of “release”, unless it can be guaranteed that some kind of perceptible consequence will invariably attend the ritual—but in that case, it is not the ritual, but the consequence that will most naturally be regarded as the “effusion”. (I cannot see much sense in saying that you receive the outpouring of the Spirit when a ‘charismatic’ group lay hands on you, rather than when, say, half an hour later, you start bellowing out nonsensical ejaculations, or flying around the ceiling, or whatever).

Or do we mean entire sanctification? If that is claimed, it is difficult to see (as Macarius warned) how you can adequately ensure against delusion or self-righteousness.

Or do we mean a perceptible increase of sanctifying grace (for instance, the cessation of obsessive lust)? That would clearly count as *an* effusion of the Spirit. But why *the* effusion of the Spirit? And if this is the line to follow, why use the word ‘charismatic’? This would be (like the previous option) much closer to the Holiness Movements than to Pentecostalism, and would certainly have nothing to do with the standard theology of charisms.

Or are we to follow the classic Pentecostals, and refer “effusion of the Spirit” to a new charismatic endowment, probably tongues? As I have suggested, I find this the most interesting possibility. But again I do not see that it will be appropriate to talk about *the* effusion of the Spirit. And it must surely be insisted that speaking in tongues (or exercising any other charism) leaves the issue of sanctifying grace exactly where it was before.

If I am right to say that glossolalia is essentially a ‘secular’ activity, by which we can in some circumstances, be, at least in germ, reconciled a little bit to our own nature and advanced in self-awareness, then that will not, of itself, make us more responsive to God’s law. It may indeed remove serious obstacles to the exercise of virtue, but it will not affect our intentions, except indirectly. What it is likely to do, though, is to make us very much more aware of the complexity of our motivation and correspondingly more aware of our own imperfections and sinfulness. This may well result, as monastic spirituality always hoped it would, in a great increase of humility and a fervent turning to God in search of deliverance and conversion. But wholeness of heart will come into it rather as an ever-receding dream than as an apprehended reality. So, quite likely, will joy and peace, except intermittently, when they may even be intense.

There is no doubt that some connexion will have to be traced between this kind of *gratia sanans* and more truly sanctifying grace, but it will, I suspect, be tangential.

An analysis of this kind, which means unpacking the 'charismatic' package, should make it more possible for us to consider what the real potential value of the 'charismatic movement' is, as well as highlighting some of the hazards involved in it. Contrary to what seems to be becoming the normal style of self-presentation on the part of the movement itself, I think we shall probably have to conclude that it has little which is original or helpful to say about sanctifying grace; if it wishes to take its stand on that, it should drop the jargon of Pentecostalism and stop referring to itself as a 'charismatic' movement. But maybe its real asset is precisely its interest in charisms and particularly in glossolalia. But in that case it will have to make rather more humble claims about its role in the renewing of church life and rather less comprehensive claims on pneumatology and spirituality.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN CHRISTIANITY II

FERGUS KERR O.P.

The restoration of churchly unity among all Christians is the agreed aim of ecumenical work. It is the programme announced in the opening phrase—*Unitas redintegratio*—of the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism (which is thus also the title). Such phraseology suggests that the unity to be restored did at some stage actually exist—that there was once, historically and empirically, an "undivided Church", prior to the conflicts among Christians that gave rise to schisms and heresies. Reflective study of church history seems, however, to keep pushing further and further back to the point at which the Church was visibly and organically one. The Decree of Ecumenism dates the first of the divisions at the refusal of what was to become the Nestorian Church to accept the dogmatic pronouncement of the Council of Ephesus in the year 431. The convoking of that council had itself been an attempt to restore Christian unity. The further one goes back into history the more evident it becomes that it has always been necessary to restore unity. The "undivided Church" begins to look more like an endless task rather than any historically dateable empirical reality. The variety and complexity of divisions among Christians become increasingly obvious. It is not at all clear that anybody, either in