

The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal: Theological Interpretation of the Experience

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Since 1967, many Catholics claim to have experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which they identify essentially as equivalent to that claimed by non-Catholic or classical Pentecostal communities of the early twentieth century.¹ Catholics in the United States have generally adopted the Pentecostal term for this experience: “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” In order to avoid anticipating any theological interpretations, this experience is here designated simply as “the pentecostal experience.”² The very term “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” it must be noted, already constitutes a theological interpretation. Assuming that the pentecostal experience is a genuine grace of God, this essay does not disparage the practice of those in the charismatic renewal who sincerely seek to grow ever closer to God. Nevertheless, the prevailing interpretation of this experience among Catholic theologians, namely, that it is essentially a sacramental grace, gives rise to theological difficulties. Also theologically problematic is the name commonly applied to it: “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to propose and defend an alternative to the common interpretation of, and the name usually applied to, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Catholic charismatic renewal.

This essay first offers an overview of the pentecostal experience as it is most commonly described and interpreted by advocates and scholars of the charismatic renewal. The second part critiques the sacramental interpretation of the pentecostal experience in the context of an examination of the precise nature of sacramental grace in order

¹ For a history of the movement, see Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

² This phrase is intended specifically to denote that experience characteristic of the twentieth-century pentecostal communities, not the experience of the apostles and disciples of the Lord at Pentecost.

to reveal the theological dangers inherent in such an interpretation. The third part briefly considers questions of terminology, arguing that the phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is inappropriate in reference to the pentecostal experience. Then, because any negative critique ought to be accompanied by a positive alternative, this essay presents and defends Jesuit theologian Francis A. Sullivan’s interpretation of the pentecostal experience, which is based on St Thomas Aquinas’ theology of the divine missions. The brief final section clarifies a few practical implications of the arguments presented here for the consideration of those involved in the charismatic renewal.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PENTECOSTAL EXPERIENCE

The first question that arises is quite simply, what is this pentecostal experience? This question is difficult to answer in precise terms because it is experienced diversely by different people. For some it may involve a real conversion experience, while for others it may be simply a deepening of a faith already very much alive. Still others may experience it at any point in between. This diversity follows naturally from the necessarily subjective, personal nature of any experience. Nonetheless, the reality at the root of the pentecostal experience can be described in general terms as a radically new and deeper relationship with the triune God in the life of the Christian, characterized by the reception of one or more of the charismatic gifts.³ What the

³ Charismatic gifts usually refer to those gifts listed in 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11; 1 Pt 4:11. Yet the distinctive gifts of the charismatic renewal are the more extraordinary gifts such as healing, prophecy, and especially speaking in tongues. A treatment of the controversial gift of tongues falls outside the scope of this essay. Yet it is worth noting that the understanding of tongues in patristic theology is not the unintelligible speech commonly associated with the modern charismatic renewal. The following patristic authors understood the gift of tongues to be the supernatural ability to speak intelligible human languages: Origen (d. 253), Hilary of Poitiers (d. 359), Eusebius of Emesa (d. 359), Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 387), Philastrius (d. 397), Pseudo-Constantius (d. 405), John Chrysostom (d. 407), Gaudentius (d. 410), Rufinus of Aquileia (d. 412), Pelagius (d. 414), Augustine (d. 430), Julian of Eclanum (d. 450), Leo the Great (d. 461), Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 466), Jacob of Serugh (5th century), Cassiodorus (d. 580), and Gregory the Great (d. 603). For a treatment of the pertinent texts, see Francis Gumerlock, “Tongues in the Church Fathers,” *Reformation and Revival* 13.4 (2004) 125-40. Similarly, medieval theologians, including Haymo of Auxerre (d. 875), Atto of Vercelli (d. 961), and Bruno the Carthusian (d. 1101), understood the gift of interpretation of tongues to be quite simply the ability to understand and translate foreign languages. Others, such as Sedulius Scotus (fl. 848-858), Lanfranc of Bec (d. 1089), Harvey of Deols (c. 1130), Peter Lombard (d. 1164), and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) took it to mean the ability to explain

many different experiences of those in the charismatic renewal seem to have in common is twofold. There is, first of all, some degree of growth in the life of grace, usually expressed as a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord. This is typically accompanied by the second common factor: a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit in the reception of one or more charismatic gifts.

A key source known as Malines Document I was written in 1974 by the Benedictine theologian Kilian McDonnell⁴ at the urging of Léon Jozef Suenens (1904-1996), Belgian theologian, cardinal, and original pastoral supervisor of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church.⁵ This document has been highly influential in the charismatic renewal worldwide. It was signed by an international group of theologians⁶ and has been translated into six languages. As such, it represents the most widely accepted views of Catholic charismatics. In answer to the basic question, “What is it that those involved in the renewal experience?”⁷ Malines Document I offers the following description:

When the Spirit given at initiation emerges into consciousness, there is frequently a perception of concrete presence. This sense of concrete, factual presence is the perception of the nearness of Jesus as Lord, the realization at the personal level that Jesus is real and is a person, that he fills the believer with that personal “I” who is Jesus.

difficult passages of Scripture. Francis Gumerlock defends this thesis in an unpublished talk titled, “The Spirit’s Gift of Interpretation: Medieval Glosses on 1 Corinthians 12:10” (paper presented at the 49th annual convention of the College Theology Society, Marquette University, Milwaukee WI, 29 May – 1 June 2003).

⁴ McDonnell is co-chairman of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue, an ongoing dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and some classical Pentecostal communities and leaders. The first three agreed accounts of this dialogue can be found in *Pneuma* 12.2 (1990) 85-142. Although he is one of the most widely published Catholic theologians on the topic, McDonnell himself is not a member of the charismatic renewal.

⁵ The Malines Documents were a series issued by Cardinal Léon Jozef Suenens to furnish the charismatic renewal with a theological and pastoral foundation, as well as an appropriate orientation. The document in question is the first in this series.

⁶ Carlos Aldunate, S.J., Chile; Salvador Carillo Alday, M.SP.S., Mexico; Ralph Martin, United States; Albert de Monleon, O.P., France; Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., United States; Heribert Mühlen, Germany; Veronica O’Brien, Ireland; Kevin Ranaghan, United States.

⁷ Kilian McDonnell et al., “Theological and Pastoral Orientations on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal: Malines Document I” [henceforth: Malines Document I], in *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*, vol. 3, ed. Kilian McDonnell (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1980) 32.

With great frequency this sense of presence is accompanied with an awareness of power, more specifically, the power of the Holy Spirit.⁸

This description of the pentecostal experience focuses on the experienced presence of Christ and the experienced power of the Holy Spirit. Although the inner transformation of the person who has such an experience of nearness to Christ is undoubtedly more important, there is no denying that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power in the charismatic gifts is more specific to the pentecostal experience. Inner transformation is not specific or unique to the charismatic renewal; the renewed expectation of the charismatic gifts is. Indeed, the First Malines Document commences its discussion of the charisms "in order to isolate the specificity of the charismatic renewal."⁹

Embedded within the description cited above is a theological interpretation of the pentecostal experience. The Spirit already given through the sacraments of initiation emerges into consciousness, which is to say that the pentecostal experience is essentially a sacramental grace. Malines Document I states this more clearly in a section entitled, "The Meaning of 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' Among Catholics"¹⁰ It reads: "When Roman Catholics use the phrase it usually means the breaking forth into conscious experience of the Spirit who was given during the celebration of initiation."¹¹ With many Catholic theologians, the Malines Document interprets the pentecostal experience in connection with baptism and confirmation together in integral Christian initiation, although it is also common to interpret it solely in connection with baptism.

Cardinal Suenens, for example, remarks that, "Different expressions are being used to define this experience of baptism in the Spirit: the grace of actualizing gifts already received, a release of the Spirit, a manifestation of baptism, a coming to life of the gift of the Spirit received at confirmation."¹² Elsewhere it becomes clear that Suenens himself interprets the pentecostal experience in connection with both baptism and confirmation: "Let me begin by describing the basic experience which is the soul of the Renewal. Progressing beyond superficial analogies, we have to understand the Renewal as a grace that reactualizes baptism and confirmation."¹³ Suenens' successor as

⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰ Ibid., 39.

¹¹ Ibid., 40.

¹² Léon Suenens, *A New Pentecost?* trans. Francis Martin (New York: Seabury, 1974) 81.

¹³ Idem, *Renewal and the Powers of Darkness*, trans. Olga Prendergast (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1983) 52.

pastoral supervisor of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church and current President of the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes, sees baptism as the root of the pentecostal experience: "For the faithful, this is simply a way of reviving the grace of Baptism, which is often, as it were, laying dormant within the soul, and allowing it to produce all its potential fruit."¹⁴ Many other notable Catholic theologians also relate the pentecostal experience either to baptism specifically or to baptism together with confirmation in the context of Christian initiation.¹⁵

University of Notre Dame's Josephine Massyngberde Ford, for example, who was involved in the early Catholic charismatic renewal, wrote that she was encouraged by the fact that most Catholic charismatics "saw it as a release of the Spirit who was already given in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation."¹⁶ René Laurentin, a French Catholic theologian, writes that "the function and purpose of baptism in the Spirit is the effective accomplishment in a Christian's life of what baptism called for but to some extent did not accomplish."¹⁷ Commenting on this text, Henry Lederle emphasizes that "the bottom line is once more the flowering of baptismal grace or the release of the Spirit previously given in Christian initiation."¹⁸ Other Catholic theologians hold similar interpretations of the pentecostal experience, including Edward O'Connor,¹⁹ Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan,²⁰ Donald Gelpi,²¹ and Simon Tugwell.²²

¹⁴ Paul Cordes, *Call to Holiness: Reflections on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1997) 14.

¹⁵ For the following sample of sacramental interpretations of the pentecostal experience among Catholic theologians I am indebted to the research of Henry Lederle, *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of 'Spirit Baptism' in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

¹⁶ Josephine Ford, "Pentecostal Catholicism," in *The Prayer Life*, ed. Christian Duquoc and Claude Geffré, Concilium 79 (London: Burns and Oates, 1972) 89.

¹⁷ René Laurentin, *Catholic Pentecostalism* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1977) 47.

¹⁸ Lederle, *Treasures*, 117.

¹⁹ Edward O'Connor, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church* (Notre Dame IN: Ave Maria, 1971).

²⁰ Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, *Catholic Pentecostals Today* (South Bend IN: Renewal Services, 1983).

²¹ Donald Gelpi, *Pentecostalism: A Theological Viewpoint* (New York: Paulist, 1971) and *Charism and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Conversion* (New York: Paulist, 1976).

²² Simon Tugwell, *Did You Receive the Spirit?* (New York: Paulist, 1972).

Stephen Clark also interprets the pentecostal experience as a sacramental grace, although he is somewhat unique in stressing its relationship to confirmation in particular rather than to baptism. Clark is president of a worldwide organization of ecumenical charismatic communities called the “Sword of the Spirit.” His position as head of this international “community of communities” affords his writings on the pentecostal experience a position of influence, especially in the life of this author.²³ In his pamphlet *Confirmation and the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit,”* Clark offers a lengthy description of the pentecostal experience:

When people receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit . . . they experience as a result of it a change in their relation to the Spirit. They experience a new sense of the presence of God. . . . They experience a change in the way in which the Spirit works in their lives. They find a new ease in prayer and a deeper type of prayer so that they would want to say that it is the Spirit praying in them. They discover a new and more immediate guidance from the Holy Spirit and the “leading” of the Holy Spirit often turns out to have extraordinary results. They find that scripture has come to life, that they can pray for things and receive them, that they have a much deeper peace and joy, a new power and love in their lives as Christian. And finally, they begin to see, in themselves and others, the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. They may pray in tongues, prophesy, interpret messages in tongues and heal people, just as the early Christians did (1 Cor. 12).²⁴

Here again, the pentecostal experience could be summarized as a growth in grace together with the reception of the charismatic gifts. It is clear from other publications that Clark allows for the more common interpretation of the pentecostal experience, namely that it is rooted in baptism or integral Christian initiation. In a manual designed to bring people into the experience of the charismatic renewal through a series of sessions built around the pentecostal experience, Clark writes that, “Catholics will see being baptized in the Spirit as a release of what has already been given in baptism and confirmation.”²⁵ In a later monograph, Clark gives classic expression to the predominant

²³ This author was raised, until his eighteenth year, in the “Work of Christ” community in East Lansing, Michigan, a member community of the “Sword of the Spirit” under the leadership of Stephen Clark.

²⁴ Stephen Clark, *Confirmation and the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit”* (Benet Lake WI: Dove, 1969) 7.

²⁵ Idem, *Life in the Spirit Seminars Team Manual: Catholic Edition* (Ann Arbor MI: Servant, 1979) 117.

sacramental interpretation of the pentecostal experience: "If the Holy Spirit is in us [through baptism and confirmation], there must be some barrier or block to our experiencing his presence and working. Therefore, we could describe our being baptized in the Spirit as the release of the Spirit in us or as our being opened to the Spirit."²⁶ Based on the similarities between his description given above of the pentecostal experience and the intended results of confirmation, Clark concludes that people baptized in the Holy Spirit "are experiencing the effects of confirmation."²⁷

According to Francis Sullivan's analysis of the sacramental interpretation, it suggests that "the power of the Spirit has been blocked or bound by our faulty dispositions, and that the removal of such blockings will free the Spirit to work more powerfully and manifestly in us."²⁸ The focus of the sacramental interpretation is the subjective disposition of the person who has received the sacraments of initiation, inasmuch as the pentecostal experience is seen essentially as a change in that disposition which allows the sacraments to accomplish their intended purpose.

The strength of the sacramental view lies in the distinction between the validity and the fruitfulness of the sacraments.²⁹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains:

By the very fact that a sacrament is celebrated according to the intention of the Church, the strength of Christ and of His Spirit work in it and through it independently from the personal sanctity of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments still depend on the dispositions of the one who receives them.³⁰

The subjective disposition of the recipient is of importance not for the validity of the sacrament, but for its fruitfulness. This is

²⁶ Idem, *Baptized in the Spirit* (East Lansing MI: Tabor, 2003) 39.

²⁷ Idem, *Confirmation*, 7.

²⁸ Francis Sullivan, "'Baptism in the Holy Spirit': A Catholic Interpretation of the Pentecostal Experience," *Gregorianum* 55 (1974) 53.

²⁹ For a thorough treatment of this distinction in sacramental theology, traditionally referred to in terms of *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis*, see Colman O'Neill, "The Role of the Recipient and Sacramental Signification," *The Thomist* 21 (1958) 257-301, 508-40.

³⁰ *Catechismus catholicae ecclesiae* [henceforth: CCE] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997) 1128: "Eo ipso quod sacramentum secundum intentionem Ecclesiae celebratur, virtus Christi et Eius Spiritus in eo et per id operatur independenter a sanctitate personali ministri. Tamen, sacramentorum fructus etiam a dispositionibus dependent illius qui ea recipit," my translation.

closely bound up with the concept of a “reviviscence” of sacramental graces, a word used by McDonnell to describe the pentecostal experience.³¹ Bernard Leeming describes what it means for a sacrament to revive:

If a sacrament is received in an unfit state, that is, without due contrition for sin and resolution of amendment, no grace is received; yet if after a time repentance follows, the sacrament begins to effect its normal grace, however long may have been the time during which it, so to speak, lay dormant as regards grace.³²

The idea of reviviscence, as applied to the pentecostal experience, is a subtler version of this. The sacramental view would hold that even if a person received a sacrament in a fit state, and so received some grace, the pentecostal experience would revive the sacrament further, bringing about a more complete actualization of the sacrament. Specifically, the predominant interpretation of the pentecostal experience is that it is a reviviscence of Christian initiation or, according to Clark, specifically confirmation. This would make it essentially a sacramental grace, that is, a grace that comes from God through the mediation of the sacraments.

A CRITIQUE OF THE SACRAMENTAL INTERPRETATION

Despite the prevalence of the sacramental interpretation of the pentecostal experience among Catholic theologians, it does give rise to some theological difficulties. Before beginning an assessment of the difficulties inherent in the sacramental interpretation, though, it will be useful to discuss the polemical atmosphere in which it arose. In a work co-authored with McDonnell, George Montague, a Catholic biblical scholar writing from within the charismatic renewal, addresses this point:

Much of the anti-Pentecostal polemic has been aimed at showing that “everything is given in baptism,” while the Pentecostals, working off their obvious experience of an explosion of “Holy Spirit power” at a later moment in the Christian life, have insisted that the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is distinct from conversion-initiation. . . . If the Pentecostal must be cautioned against downplaying the power of baptismal initiation, the sacramentalist must be cautioned against downplaying the real newness of life experienced in what

³¹ Kilian McDonnell et al., “Statement of the Theological Basis of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal,” in *Presence, Power, Praise*, 8.

³² Bernard Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology*, 2nd ed. (Westminster MD: Newman, 1960) 266.

the Classical Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals call the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”³³

Sullivan furnishes keen and valuable insight into the assumptions of Catholic theologians who originally engaged in this polemic: “Above all they wanted to avoid giving the impression that they now looked on sacramental baptism as a mere ‘baptism in water,’ as though it was only through a pentecostal experience that a person really received the Holy Spirit.” Sullivan adds, “There is an evident reluctance to speak of a new imparting of the Spirit except through the reception of a sacrament, as though this would be incompatible with Catholic theology.”³⁴ Seeking, then, to uphold the important role of the sacraments in the imparting of the Spirit, many turn to the idea of the release of the Spirit already received.

That God indeed sends fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit in non-sacramental contexts is evident in the Acts of the Apostles: “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).³⁵ This corroborates Montague’s comments regarding Luke’s Gospel:

Even for the primitive community (and by implication for the later church), the fact that the Holy Spirit filled them once does not exclude later “fillings.” And for such experiences there is no need to repeat baptism: prayer suffices.³⁶

There certainly is a distinct possibility of being filled anew with the Holy Spirit in a non-sacramental context. Sullivan’s warning is apt: it would be too extreme a reaction against Pentecostalism to hold that all grace is given only in the sacraments.

Consequently, Sullivan criticizes the interpretation of theologians such as Suenens, who insist that the pentecostal experience is not in reality a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, such as that described in Acts 4:31, but rather a re-actualization of the initial outpouring of the Spirit received in sacramental initiation. Sullivan points out that

³³ Kilian McDonnell and George Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1994) 53.

³⁴ Francis Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: A Biblical and Theological Study* (Ann Arbor MI: Servant, 1982) 62.

³⁵ All biblical citations are taken from the *Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition* (Westminster UK: Catholic Truth Society, 1966).

³⁶ McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation*, 40.

It suggests the idea, if it does not express it, that in sacramental initiation we receive a “total gift of the Spirit,” so that there can be no further question of receiving the Spirit, but only of “coming into conscious experience” of the Spirit already sacramentally imparted.³⁷

One might hesitate to impute such a view to Cardinal Suenens, yet his words seem to imply it. Consider, for example, the following remark: “The Spirit is inseparable from his gifts. When I receive him I receive the fullness of all that is his.”³⁸ Such a notion does not seem “compatible with a Catholic understanding of what happens in such a sacrament as Holy Orders, which surely is traditionally understood to involve a new sending of the Spirit with new gifts.”³⁹ Sullivan observes likewise that “The Holy Spirit is not a thing, like a source of energy, stored up in us and merely needing to be released. The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person, the Lord of His gifts, sovereignly free to give them to whom He chooses.”⁴⁰

Before carrying forward this critique of the sacramental interpretation of the pentecostal experience by an examination of the precise nature of sacramental grace, it will help to take stock of the situation. The strength of the sacramental interpretation lies in its application of the sacramental principle that distinguishes between the validity and the fruitfulness of the sacraments, tied up with the concept of reviviscence. Its weakness is its tendency to focus on a total gift of the Spirit given in baptism, possibly owing to a hesitation, born of polemics against classical Pentecostals, to speak of non-sacramental outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Whether or not the pentecostal experience is an example of this, Catholic theology does not exclude the possibility of non-sacramental outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

In order to answer the question whether or not the pentecostal experience is, as many claim, a “reviviscence of the sacraments of initiation,”⁴¹ which is to say that it is essentially a sacramental grace, an understanding of the precise nature of sacramental grace, as opposed to other kinds of grace, is necessary. The *Catechism* mentions three kinds of grace: sanctifying, sacramental, and charismatic:

Grace is first and especially the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. . . . There are *sacramental graces*, gifts proper to the

³⁷ Sullivan, *Charisms*, 69.

³⁸ Suenens, *New Pentecost*, 82.

³⁹ Sullivan, *Charisms*, 69.

⁴⁰ Idem, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” 66.

⁴¹ McDonnell, “Statement of the Theological Basis,” 8.

different sacraments. In addition there are *special graces*, which are also called *charisms* after the Greek word used by St Paul. . . . the charisms are ordered toward sanctifying grace. . . . They are at the service of charity which edifies the Church.⁴²

This threefold distinction in grace by no means exhausts the many-faceted grace of God, yet it suffices for present purposes.⁴³ In order to understand these types of grace, it will be necessary to look first at the division between sanctifying grace, which sanctifies the recipient, and charismatic grace, which builds up the Church. Then the distinction between sanctifying grace and sacramental grace, which is itself a mode of sanctifying grace, must be considered. This last distinction is analogous to the distinction between genus and species. All sacramental grace is sanctifying, but not all sanctifying grace is sacramental.

Concerning the divisions among various kinds of grace, Aquinas first asks: “Is grace satisfactorily divided into sanctifying grace and freely bestowed grace?”⁴⁴ He answers that this division is indeed satisfactory:

Accordingly, grace is of two kinds. Firstly, there is the grace by which man himself is united to God, and this is called *sanctifying* grace. Secondly, there is the grace by which one man cooperates with another so that he might be brought back to God. Now this kind of gift is called *freely bestowed grace*. . . . It is not called *sanctifying*, however, because it is not given so that a man might himself be justified by it but rather so that he might cooperate in the justification of someone

⁴² CCE 2003: “*Gratia imprimis et praesertim donum est Spiritus qui nos iustificat et sanctificat. . . . Haec sunt gratiae sacramentales, dona diversis sacramentis propria. Praeterea gratiae speciales habentur, quae etiam charismata appellantur secundum verbum graecum a sancto Paulo adhibitum. . . . charismata ad gratiam ordinantur sanctificantem. . . . Ad servitium sunt caritatis quae Ecclesiam aedificat,*” my translation.

⁴³ For a thorough treatment of the Thomistic divisions of grace into internal and external, sanctifying and gratuitous, habitual and actual, efficacious and sufficient, operative and cooperative, preventive and subsequent, see Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace: Commentary on the Summa theologiae of St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 109-14*, trans. The Dominican Nuns (London: Herder, 1952) 150-81.

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [henceforth: ST] Ia IIae.111.1, vol. 30, ed. and trans. Cornelius Ernst (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1972) 125: “*Utrum gratia convenienter dividatur per gratiam gratum facientem, et gratiam gratis datam.*” Aquinas’ term *gratia gratis data*, translated literally as “freely bestowed grace,” denotes the charismatic graces.

else. Speaking of this grace Paul says, *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the good, namely, of others.*⁴⁵

The validity of this division is grounded in St Paul's words to the Corinthians: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1). As Dominican theologian Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange notes, "From this contrast has arisen the traditional division between the graces *gratis datae*, also called *charismata*, and sanctifying grace."⁴⁶ By demonstrating the possibility of possessing and exercising charismatic gifts without charity, Paul clearly points to a distinction between sanctifying and charismatic grace. Garrigou-Lagrange explains that the two kinds of grace differ in their ends or purposes: "Grace *gratis data* is *per se* primarily ordained to the salvation of others, or 'unto profit.' Sanctifying grace is *per se* primarily ordained to the salvation of the recipient, whom it justifies."⁴⁷ Simply put, charismatic grace does not sanctify the recipient. This clearly separates it from sanctifying grace, which is given for this express purpose.

What, though, is the nature of the distinction between sanctifying and sacramental grace? Although the grace given in the sacraments is sanctifying grace, nevertheless, according to Aquinas, "there exists a real distinction between sanctifying and sacramental grace."⁴⁸ He explains:

Sacramental grace adds something over and above grace as commonly defined, and also over and above the virtues and the Gifts, namely, a special kind of divine assistance to help in attaining the end of the sacrament concerned.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ ST Ia IIae.111.1, vol. 30, ed. and trans. Ernst, 127: "Secundum hoc igitur duplex est gratia. Una quidem per quam ipse homo Deo conjungitur, quae vocatur gratia gratum faciens. Alia vero per quam unus homo cooperatur alteri ad hoc quod ad Deum reducatur; hujusmodi autem donum vocatur gratia gratis data. . . . Sed quia non datur ad hoc ut homo ipse per eam justificetur, sed potius ut ad justificationem alterius cooperetur, ideo non vocatur gratum faciens. Et de hac dicit Apostolus, I ad Cor., *Unicuique datur manifestatio Spiritus ad utilitatem, scilicet aliorum.*"

⁴⁶ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 151.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴⁸ Robert Masterson, "Sacramental Grace: Modes of Sanctifying Grace," *The Thomist* 18 (1955) 331.

⁴⁹ ST IIIa.62.2, vol. 56, ed. and trans. David Bourke (London: Blackfriars, 1975) 59: "Gratia sacramentalis addit super gratiam communiter dictam, et super virtutes et dona, quoddam divinum auxilium ad consequendum sacramenti finem."

Sacramental grace is neither divorced from nor altogether different from sanctifying grace, yet it is distinct. Charles Schleck clarifies this distinction: "It is this [sanctifying] grace, precisely insofar as it sanctifies in a special manner, that St Thomas calls sacramental grace; the special manner of sanctification is in accordance with the signification of the symbolism of the sacramental rite."⁵⁰ Sacramental grace, then, is the grace particular to a given sacrament; it is "sanctifying grace as modified in accordance with the ends of the sacraments."⁵¹ Only that specific mode of sanctifying grace that accomplishes the special effect of the individual sacrament can properly be called sacramental grace. The question, then, is this: can the pentecostal experience legitimately be construed as the release of sanctifying grace specifically modified to accomplish the end of any sacrament? This can be answered in two ways.

The first answer follows if the charismatic gifts are essential to the pentecostal experience: it must be "no." When Clark describes the pentecostal experience, he includes the reception of charismatic gifts in his description, and concludes that the Spirit-baptized "are experiencing the effects of confirmation."⁵² Whether or not Clark so intends, he implies that the charismatic gifts are proper effects of the sacrament of confirmation. When one interprets the charisms, as Clark seems to do, as essential to the pentecostal experience, then it cannot be a reviviscence of sacramental grace. The charisms do not even qualify as sanctifying grace much less that specific mode of sanctifying grace proper to the sacraments. If the charisms themselves were the proper effects of any sacrament, then one could speak of the pentecostal experience as an awakening of sacramental grace. But this is not the case. The pentecostal experience may well urge one to nurture the sacramental graces that he has received, and to desire ever more ardently the grace flowing to Christians in and through the sacraments, but strictly speaking it cannot itself be called a sacramental grace.

Although in the Acts of the Apostles charisms often accompany the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6), there is no reason to assume that they must always do so. As evangelical biblical scholar James Dunn points out:

It is true that when the Holy Spirit thus entered a life in the earliest days of the Church he regularly manifested his coming by charismata

⁵⁰ Charles Schleck, "St. Thomas on the Nature of Sacramental Grace," *The Thomist* 18 (1955) 28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵² Clark, *Confirmation*, 7.

and his presence by power (to witness), but these were corollaries to his main purpose – the ‘christing’ of the one who had taken the step of faith.⁵³

Archbishop Cordes warns against the idea that charisms must necessarily follow upon the reception of sacraments, whose purpose is to bestow sanctifying, not charismatic grace. “While maintaining the close relation of initiation to the reception of the charisms,” he writes, “we must say that the charisms are never bound in an absolute sense to the Sacraments.”⁵⁴ Despite the fact that in the early Church charisms were often sought and received in the context of sacramental initiation,⁵⁵ they are not directly effected by the sacraments. According to Sullivan, “It is the teaching of St Thomas that whenever the Holy Spirit is dwelling in a soul He always gives the virtues of faith, hope and charity. . . . But there is no charismatic gift which is necessarily connected with living in the Spirit.”⁵⁶ The reception of confirmation or any other sacrament may or may not be manifested by charismatic graces, but no sacrament necessarily effects charismatic graces.

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. Malines Document I, though, seems to overlook this necessary nuance when it proposes to “isolate the specificity of the charismatic renewal”⁵⁷ in the charisms. As a private scholar, McDonnell almost avoids the difficulty. He is careful to point out that “Baptism in the Spirit, as the awakening of the full life of the Spirit with the charisms (including the prophetic), does not belong to the essence of Christian initiation.” Yet he calls the experience the “full flowering of the sacramental grace.”⁵⁸

⁵³ James Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostal Today* (London: SCM, 1970) 226.

⁵⁴ Cordes, *Call to Holiness*, 16.

⁵⁵ This is the main thesis of McDonnell and Montague in *Christian Initiation*.

⁵⁶ Sullivan, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” 65-66.

⁵⁷ Malines Document I, 349.

⁵⁸ McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation*, 349.

Moreover, it seems extremely difficult, if not impossible, to remove the charisms from the heart of the central experience of the charismatic renewal. The specific theological difficulty inherent in the sacramental interpretation of the pentecostal experience is that the distinction between sacramental grace and charismatic grace is blurred. Thus the sacraments of Christian initiation appear to fail in some respect when they do not confer charismatic gifts on the recipient.

EVALUATION OF CURRENT TERMINOLOGY

Having argued against the prevalent interpretation of the pentecostal experience, this essay now offers a critique of current terminology, namely, the phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit” as applied to the pentecostal experience. The argument is simple and straightforward: the biblical term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” refers to Pentecost; the experience of Pentecost is perpetuated in the Church by the sacrament of confirmation; therefore “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is an inappropriate appellation for the pentecostal experience. In what follows, each of these propositions is defended in turn.

“Baptism in the Holy Spirit” in the New Testament

In order to determine whether it is theologically sound to apply the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” to the pentecostal experience, it is necessary to examine the biblical use of the term. Six times in the New Testament the sacred authors record some form of these words. All four canonical Gospels record John the Baptist contrasting himself, who baptized in water, to the One who would “baptize with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8; Jn 1:33), or “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16). Next, there are the words of Christ, who, after the resurrection, promises to fulfill this same prophecy: “And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 1:4-5). Finally, Peter’s words regarding the falling of the Holy Spirit upon the household of Cornelius refer to the same promise of Christ: “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 11:15-16).

James Dunn, in his seminal work on the biblical meaning of “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” explains the Baptist’s own understanding of the phrase. In preaching a coming baptism in Spirit and fire, the

⁵⁹ Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 11.

Baptist himself was most probably describing “the one purgative act of Messianic judgment which both repentant and unrepentant would experience, the former as a blessing, the latter as destruction.”⁵⁹ The early Church, however, reinterpreted the Baptist’s words in light of their fulfillment at Pentecost. Dunn argues that Mark’s omission of the Baptist’s reference to “fire” reveals this new interpretation:

If Mark has consciously shaped the tradition of the Baptist’s prophecy to exclude the ‘and fire’, as indeed all talk of judgment, it implies that he ignored John’s own understanding of the future baptism and preserved the saying in the form most familiar to Christian experience, in which case he is almost certainly thinking of Pentecost.⁶⁰

Dunn finds it “almost certain” that Mark sees the phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit” as referring to Pentecost, rather than to the judgment envisioned by the Baptist.⁶¹

Montague shares Dunn’s conviction that the New Testament Church reinterpreted the Baptist’s prophecy in light of Pentecost. In his exegesis of Luke-Acts, Montague underscores Pentecost as the true “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” “There can be no doubt,” he writes, “that Luke sees the Pentecost phenomenon as the ultimate fulfillment of the Baptist’s prophecy.”⁶² Christ initially fulfilled the Baptist’s prophecy and his own promise by baptizing his disciples in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It follows that all those who obeyed Peter’s words, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38), were also “baptized in the Holy Spirit.” Pentecost provides the primary locus for the fulfillment of the Baptist’s prophecy. Hence it is possible to conclude with some certainty that biblically, “to be baptized in the Holy Spirit” is to receive that gift of the Spirit given first at Pentecost.⁶³

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶¹ Dunn, an evangelical scholar arguing against both the classical Pentecostal understanding of “baptism in the Holy Spirit” and the Catholic understanding of confirmation, shares with classical Pentecostal theologians and Catholic theologians the conviction that Pentecost is the fulfillment of the Baptist’s prophecy that one greater than he would baptize in the Holy Spirit.

⁶² McDonnell and Montague, *Christian Initiation*, 23.

⁶³ Although scholars may argue about the essential import of Pentecost, there is a basic consensus that it is the fulfillment of the promise to “baptize in the Holy Spirit.” See George Buttrick et al., *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 9 (New York: Abington, 1954) 27: “The idea, evidently here present, that this promise was fulfilled . . . by the Gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost,

The Sacrament of Confirmation

The historical development of both the rite and the theology of confirmation or chrismation presents a picture of the sacrament that is anything but clear. Many liturgical theologians argue that the only adequate way to understand the meaning and purpose of confirmation is to place it in its proper relation to baptism.⁶⁴ The *Catechism* lists numerous effects of confirmation:

From this cause, confirmation produces an increase and deeper penetration of baptismal grace: it roots us more profoundly in that divine filiation in which we cry: Abba, Father! (Rom 8:15); it unites us more firmly to Christ; it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; it renders more perfect our bond with the Church; it grants to us the special strength of the Holy Spirit, so that we may spread and defend the faith by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ, so that we may vigorously confess the name of Christ and never experience disgrace in the face of the cross.⁶⁵

is genuinely primitive.” Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1964) 472: “Peter recalls the substance of what Luke has recorded in 1:5 and ends his explanation with a quotation of Jesus himself (Luke 3:16). Thus, he interprets the descent of the Spirit on Cornelius and his guests; they have been ‘baptized’ with the Spirit, just as Jerusalem Jews were on the first Christian Pentecost.” Frank Gaebelstein et al., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids MI: Regency, 1981) 268: “And now Luke gives us an extended account . . . that includes the baptism of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost . . . Luke alone connects the Baptist’s prophecy of a baptism ‘with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ with the miracle at Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 11:16).” Raymond Brown et al., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 728: “Recourse to JBap’s prophecy in connection with the Pentecost, here and at 11:16, precisely demonstrates the prophecy’s fulfillment.”

⁶⁴ For historical studies of the theology of the sacrament of confirmation and its essential relation to baptism, see Paul Turner, *Sources of Confirmation: From the Fathers through the Reformers* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1993); Aidan Kavanagh, *Confirmation: Origins and Reform* (New York: Pueblo, 1988); Gerard Austin, *The Rite of Confirmation: Anointing with the Spirit* (New York: Pueblo, 1985); Thomas Marsh, *Gift of Community: Baptism and Confirmation* (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1984); Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century* (Slough UK: St Paul, 1971); Geoffrey Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1967); Burkhard Neunheuser, *Baptism and Confirmation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964).

⁶⁵ CCE 1303: “Hac de causa, Confirmatio augmentum et altiore penetrationem affert gratiae baptismalis: nos profundius in filiationem radicant divinam in qua clamamus: ‘Abba, Pater!’ (Rom 8, 15); nos Christo firmius

An investigation of the various effects of confirmation falls outside the scope of this essay. It suffices to note only one: "It is clear from the celebration that the special effect of the sacrament of confirmation is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as it was once granted to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost."⁶⁶ This is not merely one among many effects, but rather the *effectus specialis* (special effect) of confirmation. All of the other effects flow *hac de causa* (from this cause).

Confirmation carries forward and perpetuates the grace of Pentecost throughout the ages. Hence the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship's Decree *Peculiare Spiritus Sancti donum* states that, "The special gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ the Lord and poured out upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles themselves and their successors the bishops handed over to the baptized through the sacrament of confirmation."⁶⁷ Pope Paul VI reinforces the connection between Pentecost and confirmation in equally unambiguous terms:

The Apostles, fulfilling the will of Christ, imparted to the neophytes by the imposition of hands the gift of the Spirit, which completed the grace of baptism. . . . This imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the beginning of the sacrament of confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates pentecostal grace in the Church.⁶⁸

What happened then at Pentecost happens now in confirmation. Confirmation perpetuates the grace of Pentecost. Paul VI's use of the

unit; *dona Spiritus Sancti in nobis auget; nostrum vinculum cum Ecclesia reddit perfectius; nobis specialem Spiritus Sancti concedit vim, ut fidem verbo et opere propagemus et defendamus tamquam veri Christi testes, ut nomen Christi strenue confiteamur neque experiamur coram cruce ruborem,*" my translation.

⁶⁶ CCE 1302: "E celebratione patet effectum sacramenti Confirmationis specialem esse Spiritus Sancti effusionem, sicut fuit illa olim die Pentecostes Apostolis concessa," my translation.

⁶⁷ Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Decree "Peculiare Spiritus Sancti donum," *Acta apostolicae sedis* 64 (1972) 77: "Peculiare Spiritus Sancti donum, a Christo Domino promissum et super Apostolos die Pentecostes effusum, ipsi Apostoli eorumque successores Episcopi baptizatis hominibus per Confirmationis Sacramentum tradiderunt," my translation.

⁶⁸ Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution "Divinae consortium naturae," *Acta apostolicae sedis* 63 (1971) 659: "Apostoli, Christi voluntatem implementes, Spiritus donum, quod Baptismi gratiam completeret, neophytis manuum impositione impertierunt. . . . Quae manuum impositio ex traditione catholica merito agnoscitur initium Sacramenti Confirmationis, quod gratiam pentecostalem in Ecclesia quodam modo perpetuat," my translation.

term *quodam modo* (in a certain way) could be interpreted to mean that one may receive the same pentecostal grace in another way, such as through the pentecostal experience. Yet such an interpretation would seem to render the sacrament superfluous, setting up an alternative ordinary means for receiving this grace. Is it not more reasonable, rather, to conclude that *quodam modo* here might simply recognize that a mighty wind and tongues of fire do not often accompany the sacrament of confirmation?

*A Critical Assessment of the Terminology of
“Baptism in the Holy Spirit”*

As shown above, the biblical phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit” refers specifically to Pentecost. This, as has also been illustrated, is perpetuated in the sacrament of confirmation. To refer to an event as a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” identifies the occasion with Pentecost itself. Properly speaking, then, the sacrament of confirmation is the Christian’s only true “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Confirmation, not the pentecostal experience, could be described as a truly personal Pentecost. The use of the phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit” in reference to the pentecostal experience is problematic because it implies that this experience, rather than the sacrament of confirmation, confers that special grace of Pentecost, the gift of the Spirit of which Peter spoke (Acts 2:38). McDonnell highlights this problem:

There is a problem in the use of the phrase, as it could be taken to mean that only those who have had a particular kind of experience of the Spirit have really been baptized in the Spirit. This is not the case, since every valid and fruitful Christian initiation confers “the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁹

McDonnell is citing the “Rite of Confirmation,” which instructs that confirmation be conferred through the words: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁰ He thereby implicitly acknowledges the fact that confirmation is the true “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

The danger of applying this same phrase to a non-sacramental pentecostal experience is that this experience, rather than sacramental initiation, begins to be seen as the real gateway to life in the Spirit. For the sake of clarity and theological accuracy, those in the charismatic renewal ought to heed the long-ignored appeal of Cardinal Suenens:

⁶⁹ McDonnell, “Statement of the Theological Basis,” 7-8.

⁷⁰ Rite of Confirmation 9, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (New York: Pueblo, 1983) 321.

“To avoid from now on all ambiguity it would be better to look for another expression.”⁷¹ Rather than accept a terminology that reflects the theology of non-Catholic Pentecostal communities, it would be more sensible for the Church to develop a theology consonant with the Catholic tradition, and to look for a term that reflects an authentically Catholic understanding. Cardinal Suenens’ suggestion in this regard ought not to be dismissed lightly.

A THOMISTIC INTERPRETATION

Thus far it has been demonstrated that interpreting the pentecostal experience as a sacramental grace gives rise to theological difficulties, and that “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is an inappropriate phrase for describing this experience. Now it is time to expound a positive interpretation of the pentecostal experience, and, finally, to suggest a more appropriate terminology.

This essay advocates the interpretation pioneered by Francis Sullivan, who avoids degrading the sacraments precisely by distancing the pentecostal experience from them, while acknowledging the intrinsic value of the experience itself. Sullivan’s interpretation centers on Aquinas’ theology of the missions, or sendings, of the divine Persons, of which a brief overview will be helpful. The first point is that the sending of an omnipresent being cannot involve local motion: “A divine person admits of being sent, therefore, in the sense that on the one hand this implies procession of origin from another and, on the other, a new way of being present somewhere.”⁷² In rational creatures, the new presence constituting an invisible mission of a divine Person occurs with sanctifying grace.⁷³ Aquinas explains:

There is one general way whereby, as the cause present in those that share in his goodness, God is in everything by his essence, power and presence. Over and above this there is a special presence consonant with the nature of an intelligent being, in whom God is said to be present as the known in the knower and the loved in the lover. . . . No other effect but sanctifying grace, then, is the explanation of a divine

⁷¹ Suenens, *New Pentecost*, 80.

⁷² ST Ia.43.1, vol. 7, ed. and trans. T. C. O’Brien (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1976) 211: “Missio igitur divinae personae convenire potest secundum quod importat ex una parte processionem originis a mittente et secundum quod importat ex alia parte novum modum existendi in alio. Sicut Filius dicitur esse missus a Patre in mundum secundum quod incepit in mundo esse per carnem assumptam et tamen ante in mundo erat, ut dicitur Joann[es].”

⁷³ The visible missions occurred when the Son became incarnate and when the Holy Spirit descended on Pentecost.

person's being present to the intelligent being in this new way.⁷⁴

So far, then, Aquinas has established what it means for a divine Person to be sent: not to be present in a new place, but to be present in the same place in a new way. This occurs when God begins to dwell in a soul by sanctifying grace.

In order to locate an invisible mission of a divine Person, then, we must look both for presence and for newness: "Accordingly in the destiny of a mission we should take into account both the indwelling (*inhabitationem*) by grace and a quality of newness (*innovationem*) brought about by grace. There is, then, an unseen mission to all in whom these two occur."⁷⁵ Sullivan understands this to mean that there is a new sending of the Holy Spirit, a fresh outpouring of the Spirit, whenever the Holy Spirit both inhabits and innovates a soul – that is, whenever "the Holy Spirit *dwells* in us, in such a way as to *make us new*."⁷⁶ This happens most clearly when a soul is moved from a state of sin to a state of grace, both initially in baptism and subsequently through the sacrament of penance or reconciliation. For in the transition from sin to grace the indwelling of the Spirit is itself new.

The key text, however, for the application of Aquinas' theology of the missions to the pentecostal experience, is his answer to the question whether a mission may come to one in whom the Spirit already dwells. Sullivan points out that the answer must be affirmative because "Confirmation and Holy Orders are 'sacraments of the living' . . . understood to involve a new coming of the Holy Spirit, with new gifts which the person did not have before."⁷⁷ Aquinas teaches that

An invisible mission does take place in connection with growth in virtue or the increase of grace. . . . Still there is a special instance of an invisible mission based on an increase in grace when someone advances to a new act or new stage of grace, e.g. to the grace of miracles or prophecy or to delivering himself in the fervour of his

⁷⁴ ST Ia.43.3, vol. 7, ed. and trans. O'Brien, 217: "Est enim unus communis modus quo Deus est in omnibus rebus per essentiam, potentiam et praesentiam, sicut causa in effectibus participantibus bonitatem ipsius. Super istum modum autem communem est unus specialis quo convenit naturae rationali, in qua Deus dicitur esse sicut cognitum in cognoscente et amatum in amante. . . . Sic igitur nullus alius effectus nisi gratia gratum faciens."

⁷⁵ ST Ia.43.6, vol. 7, ed. and trans. O'Brien, 227: "Sic ergo in eo ad quem fit missio oportet duo considerare, scilicet inhabitationem gratiae et innovationem quamdam per gratiam. Ad omnes ergo fit missio invisibilis in quibus haec duo inveniuntur."

⁷⁶ Sullivan, *Charisms*, 70.

⁷⁷ Idem, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit," 63-64.

charity to martyrdom or to renunciation of all he possesses or to taking up any sort of heroic task.⁷⁸

Sullivan comments on three points in this text. The first is that, although Aquinas allows that every increase in sanctifying grace could be called a mission, “He prefers to speak of such a new sending of the Divine Person where it is a question of a decisively new work of grace, such as can be described as ‘moving into a new act or new state of grace.’” The second point to which Sullivan draws attention is that “this is in keeping with his insistence that a new sending of the Spirit must involve a real ‘innovation’ in the person in whom the Spirit begins to dwell in a new way.” Finally, he notes the surprising list that Aquinas gives as examples of new missions: “All of the examples he gives would fall under the heading of charismatic, rather than sacramental, graces.”⁷⁹ Instead of citing the sacraments of the living, Aquinas moves the context outside of the sacraments.

Aquinas, then, would allow that a new sending of the Holy Spirit occurs when a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit is made new by the action of the Holy Spirit moving him into a new act or stage of grace, which may often be the result of one or another of the charismatic gifts. An experience of the Holy Spirit initiating a radically new and deeper relationship with the triune God in the life of the Christian, characterized by the reception of one or more charismatic gifts, seems to be precisely what Aquinas would call a new invisible mission or sending of the Holy Spirit. Sullivan concludes that all Catholics should always be praying for “a new ‘sending’ of the Holy Spirit, which would begin a decisively new work of grace in their lives.” This seems to be precisely the insight of the charismatic renewal. Furthermore, “as we have seen from the examples which St Thomas gives, he would obviously not be surprised if such a new work of grace involved a charismatic gift,”⁸⁰ which seems to be precisely the experience of the charismatic renewal.

Although Sullivan’s Thomistic interpretation of the pentecostal experience is not predominant among Catholic theologians, it is adopted and advocated by Alan Schreck. In *Catholic and Christian: An*

⁷⁸ ST Ia.43.6 ad.2, vol. 7, ed. and trans. O’Brien, 227: “Ad secundum dicendum quod etiam secundum profectum virtutis aut augmentum gratiae fit missio invisibilis. . . . Sed tamen secundum illud augmentum gratiae praecipue missio invisibilis attenditur, quando aliquis proficit in aliquem novum actum vel novum statum gratiae, ut puta cum aliquis proficit in gratiam miraculorum aut prophetiae vel in hoc quod ex fervore caritatis exponit se martyrio aut abrenuntiat his quae possidet aut quodcumque opus arduum aggreditur.”

⁷⁹ Sullivan, *Charisms*, 71.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

Explanation of Commonly Misunderstood Catholic Beliefs, Schreck explicitly supports Sullivan's position. Before citing Sullivan directly, Schreck clarifies the Catholic understanding of a charismatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

The Catholic Church also teaches that the Spirit of God can enter a person's life in a new way if the person simply prays for this with expectant faith. Sometimes, as in the case of Paul, God sends his Spirit to a person even without their prayer or faith. The receiving of the Holy Spirit in a new way, usually as a result of earnest, expectant prayer, is what many Christians today call being "baptized in the Holy Spirit." Nothing in official Catholic teaching denies the possibility or the importance of this.⁸¹

In the literature of the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church, the sacramental position on the interpretation of the pentecostal experience still predominates. Although Sullivan's view is in the minority, he does not stand alone, as the quotation from Schreck proves. The Thomistic, non-sacramental view of the pentecostal experience cannot be dismissed out of hand. Perhaps it is time to take closer notice of Sullivan's interpretation, especially in light of the problems with the more typical sacramental interpretation.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Four points are here offered for the consideration of those involved in the charismatic renewal, especially those involved in teaching about the pentecostal experience.

The first regards the terminology of "baptism in the Holy Spirit," which has already occupied a large portion of this essay. The point, though, deserves to be reiterated:

Whereas, on scriptural grounds, every Christian who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit has a right to think and speak of himself as having been "baptized in the Holy Spirit", Pentecostals have adopted the term to designate a particular kind of religious experience which most Christians have not had. Whether they explicitly draw this conclusion or not, their use of this biblical term inevitably includes the corollary that most Christians have not been "baptized in the Holy Spirit."⁸²

⁸¹ Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian: An Explanation of Commonly Misunderstood Catholic Beliefs* (Ann Arbor MI: Servant, 1984) 105.

⁸² Sullivan, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit," 60-61.

The second point is that grace is not conferred *ex opere operato* in the pentecostal experience. This is an important distinction. Only the sacraments dispense grace simply in virtue of the celebration of the rite. It is important not to attribute sacramental efficacy to a prayer for a non-sacramental outpouring of the Spirit. Sullivan cautions against thinking that “if a person has been ‘prayed over’ for the ‘baptism in the Spirit,’ he can be assured that he has really been ‘baptized in the Spirit,’ if neither he nor anyone else can subsequently detect any change in him that could even remotely be described as a ‘new act or new state of grace.’”⁸³ There is no reason to doubt that God, in His infinite goodness, will grant grace to all those who sincerely seek it, yet the dispositions and the sincerity of the person praying for grace are of the utmost importance in this case.

Third, the reception of a charismatic gift in itself is no sure sign of a real mission of the Spirit, which must include a real interior *innovatio* (renewal or innovation) of the person. It is possible to have and to use charismatic gifts, yet utterly lack sanctifying grace. As St Paul reminds the Corinthians: “if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13: 1-2). A new sending of the Holy Spirit, then, must be more than simply the bestowal of a charism, even though it may include this.

Finally, based on the interpretation of the pentecostal experience as a new sending of the Holy Spirit into a soul, such an experience must not be regarded as a single and unrepeatable event in one’s life. The notion that the pentecostal experience is unrepeatable follows from its regrettable association with Pentecost and with sacramental baptism, which are initiatory and unrepeatable. Sullivan’s comments on this point are worth reproducing in full:

There is no reason to think that a “new sending of the Spirit,” or a “baptism in the Spirit” could take place only once in a person’s lifetime. It is true, of course, that the use of the expression “baptism in the Spirit” can create the impression that, like the sacrament of baptism, this must be a kind of initiation, an unrepeatable, once-in-a-lifetime event. But, to my way of thinking, this is just one of the reasons why the term “baptism in the Spirit” is open to misunderstanding on the part of people who are accustomed to speak of “baptism” only in connection with the sacrament.⁸⁴

⁸³ *Idem*, *Charisms*, 74.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

Treating the pentecostal experience as an unrepeatable event may be one of the most unfortunate notions carried over from non-Catholic or classical Pentecostalism. Such a notion carries with it the clear notion of two-level Christianity: the merely converted and sacramentally initiated Christians are placed on a lower plane than the “Spirit-filled” Christians. If the pentecostal experience is unrepeatable, the implication is that it is the initiation into the life of the Spirit, a life unattainable except through this experience. The practice of praying to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit” only once while subsequently praying merely for a “further outpouring of the Spirit” sets up just such a false dichotomy.

CONCLUSION

The primary concern of this essay has been to underscore the theological difficulties latent in the prevalent interpretation of the pentecostal experience and in the use of the phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” In biblical terms, “baptism in the Holy Spirit” refers to Pentecost, and Pentecost is perpetuated in the sacrament of confirmation. Therefore applying this term to the pentecostal experience invites theological confusion as to the relative roles and importance of confirmation and the pentecostal experience. As regards a theological interpretation of the pentecostal experience, it can be seen as a sacramental grace only when the charisms are not essential to the experience. Because it is so difficult, if not impossible, for people in the charismatic renewal to separate the charisms from the heart of the pentecostal experience, it would be better to utilize another interpretation. Far from seeking to condemn the practice of those who sincerely seek ever new depths of union with God, this essay has presented and defended a thoroughly positive interpretation of the pentecostal experience, drawn from the theology of the Angelic Doctor himself and the work of Francis A. Sullivan. This interpretation considers the pentecostal experience as essentially the same as the event described in Acts 4:31, rather than those mentioned in Acts 2:4, 10:46, and 19:6. That is to say, the pentecostal experience is not the initiatory sacramental sending of the Holy Spirit, nor the reviving of this same sacramental grace, but rather a subsequent, non-sacramental sending of the Holy Spirit in response to prayer. The word that best captures Aquinas’ thought is *innovatio* or innovation. This term carries the force of moving forward into a “new act or state of grace.” Owing to the unwieldiness of this word, however, it might be more appropriate to speak simply of new outpourings or invisible sendings of the Holy Spirit.

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