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EDWARD D. O'CONNOR, C.S.C.

# PENTECOST IN THE MODERN WORLD

*The Charismatic Renewal  
Compared With Other Trends  
in the Church and the World Today*



*A Charismatic Renewal Book*



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Pentecost  
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Edward D. O'Connor, C.S.C.

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He is already at work on a second volume of the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in the Catholic Church.



## PENTECOST IN THE MODERN WORLD

In an era that cries, "God is dead," and questions whether "Christianity" has a future, the charismatic renewal comes as a vigorous affirmation that God is indeed a living God, and that *Jesus Christ* is active in the world with sovereign power.

But the charismatic renewal, or Pentecostal movement, as it is often called, is not just a counter-slogan. It is not merely the response of men who affirm to men who deny. It is a response from God himself, and a response given not with words but with deeds. As he did for his people in Egypt, and many times thereafter, God is once again in our day acting like a mighty warrior arising from sleep to put his adversaries to flight (Ps 18:65). While learned men discourse on the language with which we speak of him, and busy-bodied defenders frantically throw up bulwarks for their belief, the God who hides from the wise and prudent is manifesting himself to little ones.

## I Pentecost and the crisis of faith

1. The crisis of faith which has been developing in the Christian world for over a century, and now seems to be coming to a head, is undoubtedly one of the chief religious facts of the present age. It seems to be affecting nearly all the major religions of the world; but it is in Christendom that its ravages have been most apparent, and it is there, at any rate, that it pertains most to the present discussion. In increasing numbers, people are drifting away from the Church, losing their Christian faith, or giving up faith in God altogether. Even those who hold to their beliefs and remain in the Church have suffered such a loss of confidence that this itself amounts to a kind of loss of faith. Those who by profession are destined to be the religious leaders—clergymen and theologians—are often the very ones who proclaim most stridently that religion has ceased to matter and are asking anxiously, "Who will save us from this hour?"

In contrast with the foregoing, those who have been touched by the Pentecostal spirit are characterized by their strong, confident and joyous conviction not only that God exists, but that the whole world, and all history, are governed by his fatherly wisdom, power and love. What is remarkable about this belief is not that it is novel (which it certainly is not), or that it is firmly retained (which it is), but that it is held with such



vibrant confidence and joy. It is the conviction of people who do not merely believe in God, but have encountered him, and have experienced his power and his love.

### Demythologizing

2. Many attempts are being made to reanimate Christianity today. Two of the most radical and best known go by the names of *demythologizing* and *secularism*. Both endeavor to adapt Christianity to modern times by eliminating elements of it that are judged to be outmoded. The former, being a method of hermeneutics or interpretation, belongs to the theoretical order; the latter is a practical mentality; but the two tend to work as allies.<sup>1</sup>

*Demythologizing* starts from the conviction that, under the myth of pseudo-historical narratives, Christianity merely expresses man's permanent relation to the transcendent. Its basic dogma is that the universe is a closed system in which God cannot intervene, either by word or by deed, much less by a personal incarnation. God is regarded as the absolute ground of all being, the sublime (but unattainable) goal of all

1. Both demythologizing and secularism can be found in many different forms and degrees, some of which are more compatible with traditional Christianity than others. Since, however, my purpose here is not to study them in depth, but merely to use them by contrast to show the orientation of the charismatic renewal, I am disregarding these nuances and taking note only of the more radical forms, in which their tendencies are more vividly apparent.

striving, and the ultimate criterion of all rectitude; but he is not one who freely, lovingly and mercifully calls me by name and holds out his hand to help me.

In this perspective, Christ and likewise all the great events and institutions of salvation history become myths (and myths that no longer serve a purpose) for eternal, universal truths. For example, Rudolph Bultmann regards the Holy Spirit, not as a personal Paraclete, sent to teach and to strengthen, but merely as a figure for "the possibility of a new life which is opened up by faith."<sup>2</sup> The practical consequence which follows most obviously is that it makes no sense to address petitions or any other words to God. Prayer is not part of a dialogue, it is nothing but a meditation on the religious dimension of human existence.

In the lee of Bultmann's radical evisceration of traditional Christianity, innumerable theological adjustments of lesser scope are being tried in nearly all the Christian churches today. Their purpose is always to eliminate beliefs deemed intolerable to the modern mind; in fact, they are

2. *Kerygma and Myth*, Harper and Row, New York, 1961, p. 22. It should be observed that Bultmann does not try to fit the scriptural texts to this view. Instead, all those texts which do not accord with it, he dismisses as betraying the popular notions of Hellenistic Christianity, which even St. Paul uncritically adopted. Bultmann claims to discern the "proper thought" of St. Paul, which he characterizes as indicated above. For fuller detail, see his *Theology of the New Testament I* (Scribner's, New York), especially pp. 153 ff., 335, 337.

often naturalistic surrogates for Christian dogmas that detract in greater or lesser measure from the mystery of salvation. For example: the personal divinity of Jesus Christ is more or less diminished; the reality of his resurrection is obscured; his substantially real presence in the Eucharist is replaced by a new significance attributed to the bread in the mind of the believer; the reality of hell and Satan is scorned out of existence (as well it might be, because sin has been made into such an unlikely occurrence that there is no one to put in hell and nothing with which Satan can occupy himself); the divine inspiration of scripture is reduced to something of the order of poetic insight; and finally, as a fitting cover for all of these, faith itself is transmuted from belief into doubt.

In contrast with such tendencies, the charismatic renewal is characterized by its firm adherence to the great Christian dogmas. A few points of belief on which it has laid special stress are: 1) that God has really intervened in history for the salvation of man, by calling and forming for himself a people, whom he often delivered from their enemies under the Old Covenant, and by sending his Son to die for them and thus to seal a New Covenant. 2) That "the Lord is truly risen," and having won victory over sin and death, has poured out his Spirit upon his disciples. 3) That God still intervenes actively in the world to care for those who turn to him, working miracles for them if need be. He does this, not

out of despotic arbitrariness, but as Sovereign Lord who is at the same time a loving Father, dealing with each person freely and personally. Consequently, it does make sense to address petitions to him, and he does respond to our prayers, as Christ so often promised. 4) Finally, that Scripture is the word of God in a true and proper sense. This is not understood in such a way as to suppress the genuine responsibility of the human authors, but as affirming that they are used by the Spirit of God to communicate a message that is properly his own. Likewise, it is not meant to deny that God reveals himself through nature, and through the insights of philosophers and poets; but to assert that Scripture is his revelation in a privileged sense transcending these others. Plato or Dostoevski speak their own words, not God's. The prophets and inspired writers speak what is truly God's word, a word that still bears with it its original creative power, which it demonstrates in hearts receptive to it.

In brief, the effect of the Holy Spirit's action has been to make people adhere with whole-hearted faith—a faith that is firm belief, not doubt—to those great doctrines which have from the beginning been the framework and structure of Christian faith. This is not fundamentalism or a rejection of scholarship, but simply an honest and realistic recognition that Christianity involves some definite doctrinal positions which cannot be set aside without abandoning Christianity itself.

Pentecostals are often accused of being fundamentalist. Without a doubt, the original Pentecostals deserved the name and indeed gloried in it. However, this was not because they were Pentecostal, but because of the fact that most of them were people of little education, incapable of distinguishing between scholarly interpretation and sophistic falsification. It must be admitted that scholarship has betrayed the word of God often enough to give grounds for their mistrust; hence, they are hardly to be blamed if, in their zeal to preserve that which was from God, they sometimes rejected legitimate human endeavors at understanding.

The Pentecostal churches of today have inherited the fundamentalist tendencies of their forebears, although in a diminished degree. In the Catholic Church, however, this fundamentalist trait has not reappeared, except in a few groups that have been strongly influenced by the main-line Pentecostals. This is no doubt due in large part to the fact that the first Catholics in the movement were so often university people.<sup>3</sup> In general they have been open to, and sometimes

3. I do not want to be understood as intimating that it is only within the Catholic Church that the charismatic renewal has been conjoined with intelligence and scholarship. On the contrary, this has been the case also among others, e.g., the Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians, to mention only those instances of which I have personal knowledge. However, in no other denomination does the movement seem to have been cradled in the university to the degree that it has among Catholics.

professionally competent in, the contributions which the historical, linguistic and philosophical disciplines can make to our understanding of the human factors in Scripture and sacred doctrine. This is what distinguishes them from the fundamentalists, whose literal interpretation of Scripture leaves no room for any meaningful role to be played by cultural and psychological factors, either in the reception of divine revelation or in its transmission and exploration.

### Secularism

3. The rehabilitation of *secular* values is undoubtedly one of the main traits of the modern age from a religious point of view. On many different planes, and in many different forms, the world is experiencing a deep, powerful urge to recognize the value of the secular, in reaction to the otherworldliness of traditional Christianity. The terms *secularization*, *secularism*, and *secularity* have been coined and differentiated in an effort to take cognizance of the various evaluations that must be made of the different phases of this development.

Without a doubt, this reappraisal of the secular is in large part motivated by a just appreciation of natural values, which even the Incarnation itself demands. It cannot be denied, however, that there has also been involved in it a drift toward replacing the standards of Christ with those of a world that stands in opposition to him. There



is a secularism which, in an effort to save Christianity (which appears to it impotent and on the point of expiring), adopts the strategy, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!" Looking with a so-called "realistic eye" (which in fact turns out to be a naturalism devoid of faith) at the dynamic forces of modern culture, it seeks to adopt them and to baptize them by giving them a Christian name.

For example, there is a secularism which sets aside prayer and worship, at least for the most part, and recommends that we plunge ourselves into the activity by which the city of man is being built, with the assurance that thereby we will be contributing to the erection of the kingdom of God. Its Advent hymn is no longer the "*Maranatha*," "Come, Lord Jesus,"<sup>4</sup> of Christian faith, but the humanist boast, "We shall overcome one day." It regards contemplative prayer as selfishness, thus betraying the fact that when it views a man communing with God, it perceives only the man. "Why do you seek the living Lord in the dead tomb of the tabernacle?" it demands; "Christ is to be found in your neighbor!"

Pentecostal spirituality is the direct antithesis to this. It is constituted before all else by the discovery of God in himself, God in his own person. The direct effect of the Pentecostal experience is to introduce men into a life of prayer. It makes them realize that God is the most important person of all—not by the belittling of human

4. I Cor. 16:22; cf. Apoc. 22:20.

persons, but by the discovery of the transcendent goodness and greatness of God in himself. ("Of course we must see Christ in other people," remarked Colleen W. one day, "but he is so lovable in himself too!") It teaches that the greatest gift God has offered us in Christ, that which gives the life of grace its decisive meaning, is the possibility of direct and personal communion with God himself.

However, the Pentecostal spirit is not insensitive to the goals that motivate the secularist mentality. On the contrary, it is seriously concerned with this world, and with the reforms and achievements necessary to complete the humanization of it. Only it says that we must first be made new in ourselves by the Spirit of regeneration and renewal (Ti 3:5) before we can contribute towards making the world itself really new. We must first be filled with the love that the Holy Spirit pours forth in our hearts (Rom 5:5); then we can turn to men with a love that is redemptive, salvific and creative.

Contemporary man, for all his profession of active concern for others, suffers more than any previous generation from alienation and loneliness—at least if we may judge from his complaints. Those, however, who have been touched by the Holy Spirit do not have to endure this suffering in the same measure. They are not alone, but live in communion with a loving Father. Instead of being alienated from the world, they find themselves integrated into it by the all-embracing

Providence of that same Father, who in his wisdom makes all things work together for them that love him (Rom 8:28), and by this love binds them together with one another.

We must, of course, beware of oversimplifying the picture. The grace of Pentecost does not make a man immune to the abrasiveness and disappointments of a world disrupted by sin. Nevertheless, it does bring into one's life a note of integration, collaboration and communion that is distinctive.

### Church renewal

4. Demythologizing and secularism, at least in the radical forms just discussed, are attempts to reform Christianity by the surrender of something essential to it. There are other reform efforts, however, inspired, not by compromise with the faith, but by the strength of it. They are motivated by the acute awareness that the common life of Christian society fails in many ways to measure up to the exigencies of faith.

The charismatic renewal is in full accord with such tendencies, and is itself very aptly described as a renewal. In fact, there are few names which so well designate its spirit. However, it was not conceived, so far as human intentions go, for the purpose of renovating the Church. The Pentecostal movement did not come about as the result of any human planning or calculation at all. Only in retrospect can one recognize

that reanimation of the Christian life has been among its most significant effects.

This does not mean that the results are only a fortunate accident. Rather, it means that God himself is renewing his Church in a way that man could neither achieve nor even anticipate. Man can adjust structures and arrange materials, but only God can send forth the creative Spirit that renews the face of the earth.

This is all the more evident in that the charismatic renewal has had its effects, not by changing forms and structures in the Church, but by putting a new spirit into them.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, it is not a program for the restructuring of the parish or the diocese; it has no plan for implementing lay participation in ecclesiastical decisions. It has nothing to do with the new catechetics, the search for a new religious language, or experiments with liturgical forms. It does not seek to introduce a new type of music into Church life, whether folk or pious rock. It is not a psychological technique comparable to sensitivity training (to which it is at times mistakenly compared), or to a Christianized yoga. It is not analogous to any of these things, except on very superficial

5. Some prominent Catholic Pentecostals are convinced that new structures are also necessary, and that they are due to come about as a result of the movement. That may well be the case; but if it is, this will be only because a new spirit often needs new vehicles in which to operate, and not because the resources from which the movement draws its strength, or goal at which it is principally aimed, are to be found in the realm of such structural changes.

and accidental planes, and it has nothing to do with any of them *per se*.

That does not mean it is opposed, or that it methodically cultivates indifference, to them. On the contrary, the charismatic renewal tends if anything to favor human reform efforts. Many of the people involved in the movement are active in one or another of the lines listed above. Man can and often must modify ecclesiastical institutions; however, only the Holy Spirit can reanimate them from within.

#### Liberal or conservative?

5. The question is inevitably asked about any such movement, whether it is *liberal or conservative*. Even without expressly posing the question, many people carry around psychic litmus papers, which they will dip into any new ideology to see whether it registers blue or red. Such slogan categories seldom serve a serious intellectual purpose; they only relieve people of the trouble of finding out precisely what someone thinks. But since the question is apparently inescapable, this is the place to note that those who have only a superficial acquaintance with the Pentecostal movement within the Church usually regard it as liberal and associate it vaguely with the hippies and the underground church. The earliest reports on the movement in the Catholic press appeared in journals of a liberal tendency:

the *National Catholic Reporter*,<sup>6</sup> *Ave Maria*,<sup>7</sup> the *Ecumenist*,<sup>8</sup> and *America*.<sup>9</sup> Most of them were either favorable or noncommittal. Conversely, the first attacks on the movement appeared in predominantly conservative journals, and were motivated by distinctly conservative concerns.<sup>10</sup>

Those, however, who are better acquainted with the real motivation and effects of the movement are more inclined to regard it as pertaining to the conservative reaction in the Church. One young man remarked, "I think it would be easier for my parents to accept this movement than for me."

The truth is, I believe, that the movement

6. The *National Catholic Reporter*, April 19, 1967, p. 3: "Notre Dame Priests and Students Hold Pentecostal Prayer Meetings."

*Ibid.*, May 17, 1967: "People Having a Good Time Praying," by Mary Papa.

*Ibid.*, June 12, 1968: "Pentecostals See How They Fit In," by Moises Sandoval.

7. The *Ave Maria* of June 3, 1967, carried two articles, one by myself, "Pentecost and Roman Catholicism," and one by Henri Nouwen, "A Critical Analysis." The latter was by no means favorable to the movement, but neither was it conceived as an attack, as the author pointed out in an unpublished letter to the editor of the magazine, dated August 21, 1967. (He was kind enough to send me a copy of this letter.) This article had appeared originally in the *Scholastic*, a Notre Dame student weekly, April 17, 1967, pp. 15 ff. It has been reprinted, with negligible alterations, in a collection of the author's essays, *Intimacy*, Fides Press, 1969, pp. 77-90.

In the issue of August 19, 1967, *Ave Maria* published my reply to Father Nouwen, "Baptism of the Spirit, Emotional Therapy?"

8. "Pentecost and Roman Catholicism," by myself, the *Ecumenist*, July-August, 1968, pp. 1-4.

quite transcends the distinction between liberal and conservative. It includes both "liberals" and "conservatives." Likewise, it has felt the wrath both of conservatives who resent its spirit of newness and freedom, and of liberals who scorn the simplicity with which it holds to doctrinal positions from which they have long been emancipated. Perhaps the things that have been stressed thus far in this essay would tend to illustrate predominantly the conservative aspects of the movement; they need to be counter-balanced by those which follow.

9. "Catholic Pentecostals," by James F. Powers, *America*, July 20, 1968, pp. 43-44.
10. Thus the editorials (by Dale Francis) in *Our Sunday Visitor*, April 30, 1967 ("The Easy Way"), May 7, 1967 ("We Get Letters"), May 21, 1967 ("Pentecostal Postscript—I"); an article or letter (of which I have been unable to obtain a copy) by George McClean in the *Northwest Progress*, October 18, 1968 (a summary of this document and of the ensuing controversy was published in the *National Register*, Nov. 10, 1968, p. 3); Thomas Barbarie, "Tongues, Si! Latin, No!" *Triumph*, April 1969, pp. 20-22 (see also his retort to my critique of that article in the July issue, pp. 5 and 40).

However, a sign of a change came with the article, "Glossolalia; 'It's Rooted in Emotional Disturbance,'" by Andrew Greeley, in the *N.C.R.*, October 2, 1970. (My reply to this article was published in the October 16, 1970, issue, p. 6.) No doubt, this will not be the last such criticism in the liberal press, which is just as well. There was something unreal about being attacked only by conservatives and promoted only by liberals!

## II Pentecost and the achievements of the modern age

The points of comparison considered up to this point have all had to do directly or indirectly with the crisis through which Christianity is now passing. But the charismatic renewal must be related also to the positive achievements of our age, both religious and cultural. It can be shown that the movement is in basic harmony with some of the deepest aspirations and the most significant tendencies of contemporary man.

### Dignity and freedom

1. One of the most powerful currents of modern culture is its growing sense of the *dignity of man*, and its consequent quest for *freedom and spontaneity*, as the Constitution, *The Church in the Modern World*, pointed out.<sup>11</sup> The charismatic renewal also has the effect of bringing people to a heightened appreciation of human dignity and freedom, but in a way peculiar to itself.

The knowledge that man is a temple of the Holy Spirit gives a basis for belief in human dignity. Even more than that, the realization that he is loved by God with an everlasting love gives

11. Vatican II, "The Church Today" ("*Gaudium et spes*"), No. 12, ff. and 17. (W. W. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, 1966.)



an individual a sense of his own worth, while at the same time safeguarding him against the temptation to arrogance by the awareness that whatever is lovable in him is the effect, not the cause, of God's creative love. This same realization has been very effective in bringing many people to accept themselves—people who previously had been resentful, disgusted or discouraged over their shortcomings or ambitions to be what they could not. Likewise, reverence for the dignity of others is fostered when they are perceived as children of God, loved by him and called with a vocation that is personal and peculiar in each case.

St. Paul spoke—and even sang—of *freedom* as characteristic of the Christian, and indeed as the summation of all that Christ has brought us.<sup>12</sup> In the Pentecostal movement, people often use the term *freedom* spontaneously to describe what the Holy Spirit has done for them. He has freed them from some bond of inhibition, fear, self-pity or mistrust of self. Others, who had not been conscious of any such bond, nevertheless speak with exhilaration of a new freedom that is an interior and positive reality, not necessarily connected with one's external conditions of bondage or liberty. It is no accident that this sense of personal freedom is reflected in a conscious, common will to respect the freedom of others.

The modern demand for freedom often takes

12. See especially Galatians 3:24; 4:7; 4:21-31; 5:1-13.

on anti-authoritarian and anarchic deformations quite alien to the spirit of St. Paul. This tendency could be a threat to the Pentecostal movement, especially with people who are attracted by its superficial features, or are driven into it by a reaction against the institutional Church. In fact, however, few signs of anti-authoritarianism have appeared in the movement thus far. Precisely because the freedom given by the Holy Spirit is a positive, interior reality, and is received as a grace, it does not generate, but rather relieves, the internal pressure that leads to rebellion. When a man is truly free and knows it, with a freedom no power on earth can take from him, he can submit to authority joyously and without anxiety. Should he undergo injustices, even these can be supported with a buoyancy that is not readily depressed.<sup>13</sup>

### Interpersonal relationships

2. The modern keenness on personal dignity has not been individualistic, but has been complemented by an eagerness to establish close *interpersonal relationships* (though some may have grown weary of that term!). The human person does not attain fulfillment in isolation, it is often declared, but only through communion with others. The young seem more consciously pre-

13. I am not referring to the kind of injustice that a man would be obliged to resist, but to the multitudes of minor injustices that anyone must expect to put up with in the course of his social relationships.

occupied with love today than in any previous generation. They are constantly speaking about it and searching for it (often in the wrong way, no doubt), and seem (or claim) to value it above all other considerations.

Although the primary effect of the charismatic renewal has been to bring the individual person into contact with God, as was stressed above, it has not done this by withdrawing him in any sense from his fellowman. Quite the contrary, one of its most characteristic effects has been to create a great warmth of personal affection among those who take part in it. The Christian community has always been more or less mindful of the *commandment* of love; what Pentecost seems to bring is not just a sense of obligation but the *actual affection* of love. That "God's love is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5) has been a matter of experience.

This love is unambiguously Christian, not a merely humanitarian affection. It is rooted in faith, regulated by the law of Christ, and imparted by his Spirit. For all that, it is authentic love. It is not marked by that lukewarmness, reluctance and lack of feeling that so often characterize "Christian charity" to the point where the name has largely been discredited.

Chiefly as a consequence of this love, the charismatic renewal has been awakening in people a remarkable new sense of the meaning of Christian community. When the Holy Spirit

touches people's lives they are drawn instinctively into communities. Initially these are communities of prayer; but from the very start they tend to foster sharing on other levels also: intellectual, social and economic. The prayer groups are not closed or cliquish; they are open to all who wish to participate in them. Furthermore, they make people more concerned about the ecclesial community itself, and active members of their diocese, family and parish, as well as of their city and neighborhood. Nevertheless, it is chiefly within the group itself that people are discovering that the possibility of realizing a genuine community of love goes much farther than they had hitherto dreamed. Out of this experience there is arising a confident new vision of what the Christian community can be, the effects of which are still incalculable.

### Hunger for religious experience

3. One of the more surprising developments of the past decade is a new craving for *religious experience*, especially on the part of youth. It has sprung up suddenly and begun to flourish in the face of the apathy that remains by far the prevailing attitude toward religious matters in the Western world. More often than not this craving seems to occur in people who have abandoned churches and formal religion. Some are consciously seeking a personal encounter with God; others do not realize that the experience they

seek is essentially religious. Sometimes it is sought for by means of strange, devious, vain methods: psychedelic drugs, esoteric cults, passionate, heavy-rhythmed music, sexual excitation. Sometimes even by diabolical means, such as seances with the spirits of the dead, ouija boards, witchcraft. . . . The same thirst is manifested more moderately and negatively in the youth who refuse to attend church services that they do not find "meaningful" and "relevant."

After what has been said in the foregoing pages, there is no need to insist here on the fact that the charismatic renewal responds to this thirst by bringing people to genuine religious experience. What does need to be pointed out is that this experience is not procured or sought by means of psychosomatic, superstitious, or diabolical methods, nor by devices of any sort whatsoever, but simply by faith. Secondly, religious experience is not properly "sought after" in the charismatic renewal. There are indeed, and no doubt will always be, Pentecostals who seek religious experience as a goal in itself. But this is a deviation, an error which is well recognized by all who have a true sense of the things of the Spirit. That Christ may be glorified and the will of the heavenly Father be accomplished are the proper goals for the Christian to set before himself, echoing the prayer of Christ, "Not my will, but thine be done." But that being presupposed, it remains true that personal experience of God has a genuine role to play in Christian

life. And this experience which so many seek in the wrong places today is being realized in the charismatic renewal by those who surrender themselves wholeheartedly to the guidance of faith.

### The actuation of the laity

4. The three aspirations just treated pervade the whole of modern culture. There are also several developments peculiar to the Church itself, to which the charismatic renewal can significantly be related. The first is the coming of the *age of the laity*, marked by a great development of the lay apostolate, the appearance of a number of secular institutes devoted to the sanctification of the laity, and the recognition (which is just barely beginning to be realized in actuality) of the role of responsible lay participation in the decisions of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

It would not be accurate to speak of the Pentecostal movement as a lay movement. It is a renewal of the whole Church, affecting clergy as well as laity. Nevertheless, the initiative of the latter has been particularly remarkable. Laymen were the first to embrace the movement at Duquesne, Notre Dame, Lansing and in many other places, and it is chiefly through lay activity that it has spread. Very often, and probably in

14. On this subject, note especially two documents of Vatican II, *The Church (Lumen Gentium)*, chapter IV, and *The Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam actuositatem)*.

most cases, the prayer meetings are regularly led by laymen, and when priests participate, their role is not formally differentiated from that of the others.

This stress on the activity and leadership of the laity comes from the natural dynamics of the movement. The chief sources of its energy are the charisms and that renewal of the Pentecost experience called, "baptism in the Spirit." These involve graces and powers imparted freely by the Holy Spirit, irrespective of hierarchical rank in the Church. Moreover, the free and animated spirit which the Holy Spirit produces tends to release a person from the diffidence and passivity in religious matters which in modern centuries has become an ingrained deficiency of the typical lay Catholic. Hence, one of the most striking results of the charismatic renewal is the energizing and reinvigoration of the Catholic laity.

At the same time it has remained thus far remarkably free from any strong tones of anti-clericalism. There are many priests in the movement, and in places where they are missing, their absence is usually keenly regretted. For their part, priests often find that participation in the prayer groups is a more agreeable and gracious form of apostolate than so many others in which they are either in a position of command, or are somewhat resentfully tolerated as a kind of obligatory pious adjunct.

This does not mean that their priestly office

is being set aside. They have a distinctively priestly influence, which is exercised all the more freely and effectively because it is not restrained by rubricized procedures. What is really happening is that the mode of exercising the priestly ministry is being transformed from the stiff, formal style of the past to a more personal and informal one, which is not less but more authentic, and far more in keeping with the spirit of our times. And this is being done, not in the context of mere social gatherings, in which easy familiarity is always prone to turn into an abdication of true priestliness, but in a community of prayer, in which the spirit of supernatural brotherhood, arising from a living consciousness of the heavenly Father, enhances rather than diminishes reverence for those who have been given pastoral care for their brothers, and enables them to fulfill this office more spiritually by observing it less rigidly. Thus, the charismatic renewal, by stimulating the activity of the layman also promotes that of the priest, by freeing him from alien burdens and unnatural restraints. This is no paradox; for the members of the Body of Christ are never in competition with one another when engaged in their due function. Anything that animates one part of the body and restores its proper activity ought by that very fact to promote the welfare of the rest of the body also.



## Ecumenism

5. One of the most remarkable fruits of the charismatic renewal has been its *ecumenical impact*: It is also one of the most unexpected, because both the Pentecostal churches and the Catholic Church held the ecumenical movement in great suspicion for a long time. Both remained aloof at first from the World Council of Churches and the other major ecumenical enterprises that have developed since the 1920's. While they seemed to stand at opposite ends of the theological spectrum, like infrared and ultraviolet light, which are both invisible but for opposite reasons, the fact is that the Catholics and Pentecostals had fundamentally the same motivation in this caution, namely, fear of the doctrinal indifference and liberalism that were often the unspoken assumptions of the early ecumenical endeavors. In other words, both saw that the primary law of their existence was that of total, uncompromising loyalty to the word of God, which takes precedence over every motive for compromise and adjustment.

In the last two decades, however, two important changes have considerably altered the prospects of ecumenism. The first is the acceptance of the principle of ecumenism by the Catholic Church; the second is the spread of the charismatic renewal into the established churches. The first resulted from the growing awareness of the possibility of an ecumenism based not on a

reduction of doctrine to a lowest common denominator, but on the candid recognition that among all men who sincerely accept Jesus Christ as Lord, there is a true bond and community of faith even though this faith be conceptualized differently.<sup>15</sup> Hence, all Christians are brothers by a kinship that is deeper than the differences which painfully divide them. Likewise recognition has grown that the many elements of genuine Christian substance which are to be found in the various separated churches are used by the Holy Spirit as means of salvation for the members of those churches.<sup>16</sup>

Acceptance by the Catholic Church considerably stimulated the ecumenical movement, and

15. By this, I do not mean that different religious doctrines are merely different expressions of the same essential truth. Erroneous beliefs are a reality, and they do real harm, although the extent of the latter varies tremendously, according to the seriousness of the error. In any case, earnest faith is always very much concerned about the truth of what it believes.

Nevertheless, it is also true that underneath the conscious beliefs which a man formulates for himself, and in which he is very liable to err, he may be attaining a genuine truth, even though he cannot formulate it correctly. This is true of human knowledge in general, but in a special way of religious truth, the attainment of which depends so much on faculties and attitudes other than the skills of the active intellect. Hence, sincere faith in Christ is a reality, and one of the most precious of human realities, even when it is involved in error. It is on this basis that one can acknowledge genuine brotherhood with those from whom he is doctrinally divided.

16. These principles were officially adopted by the Second Vatican Council in its *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegratio)*, especially in section 3.

the intense activity that resulted has already begun to bear fruit. These, however, have been quite modest in proportion to the effort required to produce them. There seems to be a mounting conviction among experienced and perceptive ecumenists that the results of their labors not only fall short of the ultimate goal of full unity, but do not even tend to lead to it. Ecumenical lectures, discussions, conferences and prayer sessions lead to greater mutual understanding, friendliness, and sensitivity; but there the advance seems to come to a stop, without promise of further development. By getting rid of their ignorance about one another and dropping their prejudices, people seem to become better neighbors and better Christians, but that is all. To complete the endeavors of the ecumenists, some new element seems needed.

Perhaps it is the second change mentioned above that will supply this. When the charismatic renewal, after having been confined for decades to the Pentecostal denominations, began to penetrate into the established churches, it naturally tended to create bonds among all those who embraced it. These were not, however, bonds of doctrinal agreement; for it is not the spread of *ideas* about the Holy Spirit that constitutes the Pentecostal movement, but *experience* of the Spirit's powerful action. The bonds established have been those of personal love. Numerous examples from all over the country could be given of warm personal affection between Catho-

lics and people of other denominations that has resulted from their common participation in prayer groups. These people do not get together to compare traditions or discuss differences, but to worship the Father together in the Spirit of Jesus. They do not in any sense renounce or gloss over the beliefs that divide them. They find, however, that in praying to their common Father and glorifying their common Lord, they are bound to one another with the affection of brothers. Moreover, it is not just the experience of common worship which has this effect. After all, Catholics and Protestants have worshiped together many times before now. While this generally has helped to break down barriers, it has seldom built deep, lasting ties of brotherhood. What is distinctive about the charismatic renewal is that such ties are in fact formed, and quickly become very strong. They seem to be the result, not simply of personal contact, but of the experience of Christ's presence through the Spirit.

This love is not simply an emotion, although it is often very sensibly felt. Likewise it is not just a vague, intellectually indeterminate effusion of affection. It is definitely and consciously a love in Christ, based on the realization that the other is our fellow in following and serving Christ, that he too is a beloved son of the Father. This realization is not so much grasped with the mind as it is sensed pervasively at all the levels of one's consciousness. Likewise the love does not so much result from this realization, as it is received

as a gift from him whose very essence is love.

In short, the charismatic renewal seems to be the Holy Spirit's own ecumenical action. It does not nullify human ecumenical endeavors, but surpasses and completes them.

### The liturgical movement

6. It was pointed out above that the Pentecostal movement is on a different plane from the *liturgical movement*. Now, however, it must be observed that there is a profound kinship between the two. This also will come as a surprise to many. The main-line Pentecostal churches have generally been noted for the low esteem in which they hold liturgical prayer, and for the slight importance they attach to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. There are, however, indications that a new trend toward greater appreciation of these and other sacraments has quietly begun to assert itself in many denominations.<sup>17</sup>

In 1960 a group of Episcopalians pastored by Father Dennis Bennett in Van Nuys, California, received national publicity for having accepted glossolalia into their life as Episcopalians.<sup>18</sup> From that date onward, it has been impossible to cate-

17. Some of these indications are given by P. Damboriena, *Tongues of Fire*, Corpus Books, 1969, pp. 75-82. These are confirmed by the present author's experience.

18. Cf. John L. Sherrill, *They Speak With Other Tongues*, Spire Books, p. 61 ff. Dennis Bennett, *Nine O'Clock in the Morning*, Logos International, 1970, chapters one to eight.

gorize the Pentecostal movement simply as anti-liturgical.

In the Catholic Church, the charismatic renewal has had a strong liturgical spirit from the beginning. Many of the early leaders were and still are active in the liturgical movement, both as enthusiasts and as scholars. Much more significant is the fact that the Pentecostal spirit has had the effect of giving many people a greater love for the liturgy, and inciting them to a more lively participation in it. People frequent Mass and the sacraments more often; monks find that praying in tongues puts them in a better frame of mind to recite the office.<sup>19</sup> During the National Pentecostal Convention at Notre Dame in April, 1969, when an open-air Mass was celebrated at the Grotto with some 400 people in attendance, a number of faculty members who had previously evinced no sympathy whatsoever for the movement, declared that they had been deeply impressed by the beauty of this Mass. There was nothing original in the form of the celebration; the beauty came from the spirited and devout manner in which people sang and responded, instead of the mechanical routine that is more usual in our churches.<sup>20</sup>

The antiphons of the liturgy are filled with

19. See chapter 6, of my book, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*, especially p. 166 ff.

20. The closing Masses of the 1970 and 1971 conferences were still more impressive. No doubt, the size of the assembly—1200 people in one case and 4000 in the other—had much to do with this. Likewise, the giving of testimonies and the charism of prophecy were gra-

summonses to the Christian people to "celebrate with gladness," to "sing to the Lord a new song," to "proclaim before all the world," and even to "shout and clap your hands for joy." But the dead monotone in which the typical parish congregation mumbles these stirring appeals shows that the people do not even hear what they are saying. Many of the recent changes in the liturgy were motivated by the intention of securing greater active participation by the congregation; but to parrot words without feeling is hardly an improvement over silent attention. Some places have succeeded in securing a more lively and interested participation by means of more popular forms of music, informal styles of celebration, and the perpetual introduction of new "gimmicks." Such devices often do make the liturgy more attractive, especially to young people; but they also risk destroying the sense of sacredness, and sometimes come close to turning the Mass into a kind of ecclesiastical fun-time, deprived of most of its value as worship. In the Pentecostal movement, livelier participation is chiefly the effect of a more living contact with God. The song is in the heart before it is on the lips.

Some liturgists (amateurs, however, more than professionals) take it amiss that the chief vehicle

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ciously introduced into the liturgy of the word. Nevertheless, it was still the spirit with which people participated which made the overwhelming impression.

and expression of the Pentecostal movement should be the prayer meeting, since this is not a liturgical form of prayer. It should be asked, however, whether these spontaneous gatherings of Christians to express freely their heartfelt sentiments toward God do not recapture an element of the primitive liturgical spirit that has been lost in the completely formalized services of the present day.

Others are troubled by the fact that many people find a deeper atmosphere of prayer and a more powerful sense of the presence of God in the prayer meetings than they do at Mass or in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. This would seem to imply that the prayer meeting is somehow better, holier, and a more effective vehicle of the Spirit than the Eucharist—a conclusion that would be intolerable to anyone who recognizes, with Vatican II, that the liturgy (and therefore above all the Eucharist) is “the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed” and “the fountain from which all her power flows.”<sup>21</sup>

It is an error, however, to suppose that our personal religious experience is or ought to be a kind of barometer of the objective value of the religious service. Even in purely human relationships, people are often more deeply touched by some little token of affection or esteem than by the big, substantial interchanges on which life

21. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum concilium)*, No. 10.



depends. Much more is this the case with religious experience, which depends not only on the whimsies of human psychology but also on the sovereign freedom of the Spirit who breathes where he wills. He may use the most casual aspiration, or the glimpse of a falling leaf, as the vehicle of his light and grace, just as well as the most sacred liturgical function. If this were not so, the reception of Communion at Mass ought to be the most moving religious experience for any believing Christian. But the fact is that those acts which are in themselves most sacred are often those which most need to be exercised in pure faith. The grace which many people experience so powerfully at the prayer meetings is not a sign that they hold these meetings in higher esteem than the Eucharist, but it does help them to appreciate what takes place more profoundly and more hiddenly in the Eucharist.

### The biblical movement

7. The *biblical movement* is another of the most important developments in Catholic life during the past few decades. It was touched off particularly by Pius XII's encyclical, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, in 1943, and has borne fruit on the levels of both scientific research, and popular study and reading.

The charismatic renewal is related to this development in very much the same way as it is to the liturgical movement. It has had a powerful

effect in arousing in people a love of Scripture as the word of God. This effect has not been due chiefly to any deliberate promotion. It is the Pentecostal grace itself which has produced a thirst for the reading of Scripture. This was especially obvious in the early days of the movement when the effect was quite unexpected.

Thus the charismatic renewal stands in contradiction to some of the trends affecting the Christianity of our day, and in accord with others. It is in contradiction with those which regard Christianity as dead or irrelevant, or which would salvage it by a process of demythologizing or secularizing. It is in accord with the new sense of the dignity and freedom of man, with the appreciation of the value of interpersonal relationships, with the hunger for an experience of God which pervade modern culture. It is likewise in accord with several of the most powerful movements in modern Catholic life: the ecumenical, liturgical and biblical movements, as well as the movement to recover the full place of the layman in the Church. It transcends the distinction between liberal and conservative, and promotes renewal in the Church without being bound itself to any particular program of reform.

### III

## The distinctive characteristic of the charismatic renewal

If, finally, we ask what it is that distinguishes the charismatic renewal from those other movements with which it is in accord, I would answer: the direct and manifest operation of the Holy Spirit. However, this answer must be very precisely qualified.

In the first place, it does not mean that only the charismatic renewal is the work of the Spirit. There are myriad ways in which the Spirit of God is active in the Church and in the world; but in most of them, he remains the hidden source of activities which spring visibly from a human initiative undertaken in response to a recognized human need. In the charismatic renewal, his action is direct and manifest. Thus there is good reason to believe that the biblical, liturgical and ecumenical movements, the rediscovery of the place of the layman in the Church, the *cursillo*, and many other activities that are contributing to reinvigorate Christian life today have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. But it is not *manifest* that these are his works. On the level of what is *manifest*, it can be said that they originated in the minds of men who perceived some need in the Church and thought out a way to satisfy it. They engendered movements that have influenced Church life positively because the need they sensed was real, the idea they conceived

was sound, and the strategy they devised was effective. (The fact that in most cases these works resulted from the contributions of several men, no one of whom clearly foresaw the outcome, complicates the picture but does not essentially alter it.)

The charismatic renewal, on the contrary, did not begin as an idea or a strategy in the mind of any man. Both in its first beginnings in 1900-1901, and in its beginning among Catholics in 1967, it originated among people who had no plan, but simply turned to God in earnest prayer. It was set in motion, not by a human initiative, but by an act of power of the Holy Spirit beyond all the expectations and dreams of those who had called upon him.

Likewise, in its continuing operation, this renewal does not consist in any program (e.g., of conferences, discussions and meditations) or any technique (such as those used in sensitivity training, group dynamics, etc.). So far as man's part is concerned, the charismatic renewal consists essentially in a turning to God to await the fulfillment of his promises. The movement is indeed beginning to develop programs and techniques of its own, and rightly so; but these are subordinate; they do not define or characterize it.

The truly characteristic features of the renewal are the charisms, the "baptism in the Spirit," and the various fruits of the Spirit. These are not the result of any method or technique which pre-

pared for them on the human and psychological plane. On the contrary, the disproportion between these spiritual effects and the human preparation which preceded them is striking. A person who had taken part in a very popular and effective weekend retreat once remarked:

On the retreat, the effects were very real and powerful, but you knew where they came from. They were due to the combined impact of all the conferences, prayer and reflection of the weekend. Likewise, you had the impression that you and the others with you worked very hard for everything you got. But in the baptism in the Spirit, it is so evident that everything you have received has come as a sheer gift.

Of course, someone who holds that there is a psychological explanation for all such things will reject this testimony, and will insist that there have been subtle psychological factors at work unbeknown to the participants, which explain the effects in a purely natural way. This is an *a priori* assumption which disregards the very real evidence of human experience that doesn't fit in with it. Those who hold to this kind of scientism ought at any rate to make some effort to explain how the Pentecostal movement, without planning or technique, has been so remarkably successful in producing fruits that so many people and movements, using every conceivable psychological technique, try in vain to achieve.

There have been other movements in the Church, it is true, which originated without human planning, and seem to have been stirred up by the Holy Spirit. Two striking examples are the monastic movement of the fourth century and the appearance of the mendicant friars in the thirteenth. These can be regarded as actions of the Holy Spirit revivifying the body of Christ. Moreover, they were very charismatic at first, but became less so thereafter as a progressively greater role fell to human planning and effort. One is tempted to ask whether the charismatic renewal is not just another instance of the pattern. However, it seems that the charismatic element in these other movements had the character of an adjunct. It was never their characteristic feature; hence none of them was ever regarded as a "charismatic renewal."

On the other hand, it would be an exaggeration to imagine that all or most of the activity in the charismatic renewal comes about by the direct and manifest operation of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, if we are to speak quantitatively, it would perhaps be found that most of the activity involved, for example, in a prayer meeting is quite human and natural in its mode. There is a great deal of human initiative that goes into preparing the meeting, conducting it, and following up on its fruits. Nevertheless, it remains true that the charismatic and supernatural interventions of the Spirit are what give the meeting its distinctive tone, power and value. All of the

preparatory and organizational activity is intended merely to make the human heart receptive to these interventions, and faithful in fulfilling their exigencies. As John the Baptist prepared the way for the Savior, so human effort prepares the way for the action of the Spirit.

In order to grasp at the deepest level the sense of the distinction that has just been made, between the Pentecostal and other movements, we may have recourse to the distinction made by St. Augustine between gratia operans and co-operans.<sup>22</sup> There are some things God does by himself, and others that he does through the natural activity of his creatures. For example, there were times when God told the Israelites to remain still while he destroyed their enemies for them;<sup>23</sup> at other times, they had to do battle for themselves, but it was still his power and not theirs which was ultimately responsible for the victory.<sup>24</sup> In both cases, the work is of God; but in

22. Cf. St. Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, ch. 17. See also the deeper analysis of this distinction by St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 3:2. Note, however, that I am using the distinction in a different perspective from that of St. Augustine. The effects of *gratia operans* need not be manifest, but I am dealing precisely with effects which manifest the work of *gratia operans*.

23. Cf. the prophecy of Jahaziel when Jerusalem was terrified at the approach of its enemies: "You will not need to fight in this battle; take your position, stand still, and see that victory of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem" (II Chron. 20:17).

24. Thus the warrior-king David, at the close of his career, is represented as praying thus: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty. . . . In thy hand are power and might;

one case this is manifest, whereas in the other his work is hidden under the activity of men.

Both modes of operation have their place in the life of the people of God, and the choice between them does not lie with man but with God. Ordinarily, man is left in a "natural" regime, in which God's operation is hidden, and man must do all he can by his natural powers. But there come moments when God intervenes manifestly and directly, to show that he is still sovereign. At such moments, man's activity must cease. By that, I do not mean that man becomes and remains altogether passive; in fact, he may be stirred up to greater activity than before. But at the moment of God's action, or more exactly, in relationship to God's action, man's posture must be that of passivity and receptivity. When the Lord tells his people, "Be still and see that I am God," man must let God act.

In other words, man has been endowed with a natural reason and faculties which he must use to the best of his ability in serving the Lord. The style, measure and economy of the work he does are ordinarily determined by these natural resources on which he must rely. But there are privileged moments in which the Lord intervenes to introduce a new, supernatural economy into human life. By his Spirit, he takes over some of the initiative and sovereignty which had previously been relegated to man. Then man's role

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and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all" (1 Chron. 29:11, 12).



becomes one of following the lead of the Spirit and of docile cooperation. Insofar as his activity is called for, it must be totally submitted to the divine initiatives. For man to try to keep the initiative and do things his own way would simply cause interference and disturbance in the work of God.

This entails the surrender of man's autonomy—a sacrifice that is not easy. It hurts man's pride to be led by another, and it frightens him to be taken along a path of which he does not see the outcome. This is perhaps the deepest reason why the Pentecostal way is so often rejected, even by good people. They are willing to work for God; they are even used to doing so; but it must be in their own way—the natural, human way, in which they retain their autonomy. In placing (however unconsciously) this restriction, they deprive themselves of the holiest, most precious, and most supernatural action of God who, in taking possession of man, does not suppress human dignity, but fulfills the deepest aspirations of the human spirit, and brings it to a holy perfection beyond any it could have dared to aspire to. "They that are led by the Spirit of God—they are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14).

The charismatic renewal is a major instance of such a divine intervention. Modern man had gotten used to thinking that his affairs rested solely in his own hands. He was building for himself, not a Tower of Babel, reaching to the heavens, but a kind of astrodome: an artificial

heaven designed to shut him in from the heavens of God and from the free breath of God's Spirit. The wise men of the world began to speak of God as a *Deus ex machina*—a spurious explanation invoked to cover the unsolved riddles of the universe.

God is replying with a mighty breath of his nostrils—not so much knocking down the building which man has constructed, as passing lightly through its futile walls and bringing life back to the suffocating creature who had shut himself up inside.

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