

Some Serious Flaws In The So-Called Charismatic Movement

1. *Centennial of Saint Teresa*

We dedicate these lines to the memory of St. Teresa of Avila, the Mystical Doctor, the crowned Princess in the realm of spiritual theology in the Catholic Church. Odd as it may seem, while in many nations this centennial is celebrated with gatherings of theologians and experts in the field of Catholic spirituality, the deviations of the so-called charismatics, in flocks of greater numbers, continue. Hence, the questions: is this so-called charismatic movement really charismatic? Can it be considered as a true way of Catholic spirituality along the lines traced by St. Teresa and by St. John of the Cross?

Given the boundless enthusiasm and the exaltation of spirits engendered in the psyche of those involved in the movement, the very fact of questioning the legitimacy of their claims, may create ill disposition towards this kind of investigation, or even, perhaps, towards the investigators themselves. Yet, an answer to the questions is overdue since it is vital to the spiritual life of the faithful.

Our answer to these questions, sorry to say, is frankly in the negative, namely, we do not consider these so-called charisms to be real charisms. Neither do we consider this movement a true way of Catholic spirituality. To show the rationale of our position, a complete theological exposition, even if greatly abridged,

would require some discussion on the topics such as grace, supernatural virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as an explanation of the nature of real charisms, i.e., of the *gratiae gratis datae* as distinct from sanctifying grace. These graces are the real charisms. They do not sanctify *per se* their recipient; yet, they are supernatural graces that in a divine manner help towards the sanctification of others as willed by God. Obviously, such a fundamental exposition is beyond the limits of our study.

There are nevertheless pertinent reasons, real flaws in the start and evolution of the movement that evidently show that the name charismatic given to this movement is a misnomer, and why the movement cannot be considered a genuine way of Catholic spirituality.

Thus, with the gracious permission of our "charismatic" brethren, may be allowed to tell of the flaws we discover in this movement.

2. *The original sin of the "Charismatic Movement"*

It is a fact readily admitted that this movement did not emanate from the doctrine and the practice of the Catholic Church, the Mater et Magistra of true spirituality, through the centuries, from Pentecost to good Pope John. Indeed, this movement did not originate from any promptings of the Holy Spirit, as genuine charisms do. This movement originated from the itch for the supernatural in some ill-instructed Catholic intellectuals and from an erroneous belief of the Protestant Pentecostals, who think that by God's design, the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, and generally in the first days of the Church, should continue as the ordinary rule of development of the life of the Church down the centuries to the end of time.

Misled by this kind of Protestant mentality, some Catholic intellectuals approached the Protestant Pentecostals who received them and trained them in their peculiar theories and introduced them into their characteristic worship. The story of these origins is thus presented by Father F. A. Sullivan, S.J., in the prestigious magazine of the Gregorian University: "Neo-pentecostal Protes-

tants provided the bridge across the chasm that had previously separated Pentecostals and Catholics. The reading of two books about Pentecostalism led four Catholic lay faculty members at Duquesne University to seek out a group of neo-pentecostal Protestants (Episcopal and Presbyterian) in a Pittsburgh suburb, so that they might learn from them how to receive the baptism in Spirit. After attending several prayer meetings with this group, two of the Catholics asked that they might be prayed for and have hands laid on them by the members of the group; when this was done they had the typical pentecostal experience and began to speak in tongues. These two subsequently organized a Catholic Pentecostal group among the faculty and students at Duquesne University; from these the movement spread to Notre Dame and other Universities, and to parishes, convents and monasteries in all parts of the United States."¹

The reading of this story suffices to show that even to non-proficient theologians, these supposed charisms cannot be true charisms. True charisms, by their very nature, should come from the original promptings of the Holy Spirit. If they spring from any other source they in no way may be called true charisms. True charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit, one of the Persons of the Bl. Trinity, to whom the work of the sanctification of men is attributed. St. Paul enumerates them in his first letter to the Corinthians, Chap. 12. Now, the Holy Spirit being absolutely transcendent, by necessity must be the starting principle, the only originator of whatever activity and of whatever gift that may be said to come from Him. St. Paul tells us that "*all these — the charisms — are inspired by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as He wills*", I Cor., 12:11. Any attempt by any man to obtain them cannot be even conceived without real absurdity. How much more absurd it is to go on searching such graces outside the very Church whose very soul the Holy Spirit is? Yet, here we have these Catholic intellectuals with their faulty theology, departing from Catholic unity and approaching our Protestant brethren, and begging from them, through

¹ F. A. Sullivan, S.J., *The Pentecostal Movement*, "Gregorianum", 1972, Pag. 224-245.

these so-called charisms, a way of Christian spirituality that the Protestants unfortunately, do not possess. This shying away from the Catholic Church and this substitution of the promptings of the Holy Spirit by the individual opinions of our ill-informed Catholic intellectuals we consider to constitute the original sin of the Movement with the many *sequelae* that will flow from it. Little wonder then if our "charismatic" Catholics are continually exposed to dogmatic and biblical errors regarding the way of spirituality. And this danger shall become ever greater if our Catholic brethren share with our separated brethren and their Pastors in seminars, prayer-meetings and the like.

3. *A burning zeal for the miraculous*

There are, to be sure, two kinds of true charisms. Some of them operate in a rather natural way within the order of grace. Other charisms, in contrast, operate in a miraculous manner, and they are true miracles, all exceeding the power of created nature. This first kind of charisms is enumerated by St. Paul in *Rom.* 12:3-21, in *Eph.* 4:4-17, and following. Rooted in the virtues of faith and in charity towards God and neighbor, these ordinary charisms are continuously activated by the Holy Spirit. They constitute the fountainhead of all the admirable works of charity and beneficence in the life of the Church especially in the fields of teaching and of social action for the poor and the sick. Being by nature the by-product of Christian virtues, these charisms may be exercised at will by the faithful according to the unending promptings of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God carries out the admirable work of Sanctification in His Church as we read in the lives of the saints.

The other kind of graces, i.e., the supernatural and the miraculous are also true charisms. But they are not rooted in the virtues of faith and charity and all other Christian virtues. They are *transient acts* and *transient motions* of the Holy Spirit, and so, they need the actual prompting and the actual support of the Holy Spirit, without which they even metaphysically cannot start or they cease to be. These are the charisms that are supernatural in themselves and in their operation and, by nature, they are real

miracles. St. Paul listed them and explained their invaluable power in *I. Cor. Chap. 12 to 14*. The more flamboyant charisms are the following: "...the gift of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues", *I. Cor. 12:9-10*. Obviously, these charisms are not rooted in sanctifying grace or in any of the Christian virtues, and therefore they cannot be exercised at will by those who are in the state of grace. They depend totally, in their being and their duration, on the good pleasure of the Holy Spirit. It is He who grants them as He wills and He alone "*apportions to each one individually as He wills*". (ib. v. 11).

Unfortunately, though, many, if not all our "charismatics" seem to care little for the first kind of charisms, which help to sanctify through the exercise of Christian virtues. They do hunger, rather too anxiously for the supernatural and for the miraculous. Here we find a great flaw in this movement. Obviously, their so-called charisms are by-products of their own craving and activity.

Even in the normal process of the way of the spirit as taught by the Holy Masters, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, *the appetite for the supernatural*, according to the former, must not be sought out before God, in His good pleasure, and in His own good time, raises the soul to supernatural contemplation. The reason for this, according to St. Teresa, is that such inordinate desire cannot be conceived without spiritual pride, when the foundation of the spiritual edifice is totally based on humility. Even the visions and the revelations that, at times, by God's will, accompany the life of prayer should not be sought by the spiritual man as the true means of uniting the soul to God. Indeed, and here St. John of the Cross is firm, the union with God is not obtained through visions and revelations but only through faith and charity, in the faith of his Dark Night and in pure *naked love*. This nakedness is for the Saint the utter denial of self-love and the appetite of anything that is not God.²

² St. John of the Cross. *Subida al Monte Carmelo*. Libro Segundo, Cap. XIX *et passim*.

In like manner, St. Teresa, with her deep insight analyzes and insistently warns of the dangers that lie ahead: the subtle infiltration of the devil, the spirit of lies, as well as the constant activation of the spirit of self-love, the two spirits ever opposing the Spirit of God in the way of Christian spirituality. In various parts of her works, especially in the long chapters of her *Interior Castle* or *Las Moradas* and in her marvelous book, *The Book of her Life*, Saint Teresa explains at length the way how to distinguish the spirit of the devil and the spirit of self from the Spirit of God.³

As for not fostering the inordinate desire for the supernatural, read the beginning of Chapter 12, under this subtitle:

"Continues the discussion of this first state. Tells about how far we can get, with the help of God, through our own efforts, and about the harm that results when the spirit desires to ascend to supernatural things before the Lord grants them.

*"...that is what we ourselves can do. Whoever would desire to pass beyond this point and raise the spirit to an experience of spiritual consolations that are given would lose both the one and the other, in my opinion; for these consolations belong to the supernatural. And if the intellect is not active, the soul is left very dry, like a desert. Since this edifice is built entirely in humility, the closer one comes to God the more progress there must be of this virtue; and if there is no progress in humility, everything is going to be ruined. It seems a kind of pride to desire of ourselves to ascend higher since, in view of what we are, God does too much just in drawing us near Himself . . ."*⁴

In this regard, according to St. Teresa, this proclivity to the supernatural would suffice to pronounce their charism untrue and their way of spirituality, at least, a very dubious way. At this point may we be allowed to express a wish: how profitable it would be for our "charismatics" and for their mentors and masters some familiarity with these two Masters of Catholic Spirituality, Saint Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

³ St. Teresa of Avila, *Castillo Interior* or *Las Moradas*. *Morada Sexta*, Cap. III; *Libro de la Vida*, cap. XXV.

⁴ St. Teresa, *Libro de la Vida*, Cap. XII.

4. *"To another various kinds of tongues"*

Glossolalia or the gift of tongues is for our charismatics a logical sequel from the error of the Protestant Pentecostals. These Protestants hold that the marvels of Pentecost and the abundance of charismatic graces described in the *Acts of the Apostles* is a day-to-day occurrence until the end of the world. So they consider the gift of tongues too as a normal development for all Christians. Little wonder, then, if our charismatics feel carried away by their gift of glossolalia.

Indeed, in the book of *The Acts* the glossolalia on Pentecost, and, though less sensational in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:45-46), and at Ephesus among the disciplines of John the Baptist (Acts 18:6-7), St. Luke shows the characteristics of true charisms. Everything there was the work of the Holy Spirit alone and beyond expectation.

However, the gift of tongues claimed by our charismatics is well described by St. Paul all throughout the 14th Chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians. But, here too, our charismatics seem not to have learned and they certainly ignore the very instructions and the very words of the Apostle:

1. St. Paul places the gift of tongues in the last place and considers it as of the least value among all other charisms, especially of less value than prophecy.

2. Even so, the small value of the gift of tongues may possess is utterly dependent on *the understanding* of the tongue which is spoken, or, at least, on the gift of interpretation by someone present. And this gift of interpretation is a gift altogether distinct from glossolalia itself.

3. Now, if this gift of interpretation is not present, then, the one who speaks in tongues should keep silent among the brethren, according to this stringent order: *"But if there is no interpreter let him keep silence in the Church, and speak to himself and to God."* 1 Cor. 14:28.

One wonders how is it possible that the mentors and masters among our charismatics do not observe this teaching of St. Paul.

However, doctrine and theory aside, let us see the facts about this sham charism. Read the following statement by one

who, though favorable to the Movement, honestly accepts the facts:

"The best linguistic studies of glossolalia indicate that the tongues spoken by neo-Pentecostals are not languages in the strict sense of the term. They do not give evidence of possessing systematic vocabulary and syntax.

"As William Samarin puts it, 'there is no mystery about glossolalia. Tap α recorded samples are easy to obtain and analyze. They always turn out to be the same thing: string of syllables made up of sounds taken from all those that the speaker known, put together more or less haphazardly but which nevertheless emerge as word-like and sentence-like units because of realistic language-like rhythm and melody... Yet in spite of superficial similarities, glossolalia is fundamentally not language. All specimens of glossolalia that have ever been studied have produced no features that would even suggest that they reflect some kind of communicative system.'"⁵

Thus, by their own admission, we have that the tongues spoken by our charismatics are not even language, but just a kind of smattering of their own bordering on the ridicule. And how can anyone, who is not totally destitute of sense, attribute it to the Holy Spirit?

5. *The "Baptism in the Holy Spirit"*

Here we meet with the greater flaw in this Movement under our study. So glaring is this fault that, by virtue of it, the Movement cannot be considered to be contained within the framework of Catholic orthodoxy. This may appear too harsh a qualification. So, a cogent reason for our qualification is in order. Our judgment is based mainly on two theological considerations. First, on the very essence of what they called "Baptism in the Holy Spirit"; and, secondly, in the effects attributed to this so-called Baptism.

Unaccustomed as they are to clear-cut definitions, our charismatics when writing in books and magazines, are sufficiently specific on these two points. Both as regards to *the imposition*

⁵ Donald Gelpi, S.J., *American Pentecostalism*, in "Concilium", November, 1973, p. 104.

of hands by the persons present in the charismatic meeting and the effects attributed by them to those who are initiated into such Baptism, they claim that by the imposition of hands and their prayers the initiate receive the Holy Spirit and at least a number of His charisms. Since these facts are considered important for our study allow us to quote from their authors, for on account of this ceremony and its alleged effects we consider this Baptism and this Movement to be outside the boundaries of Catholic orthodoxy.

1. Father Edward D. O'Connor, a great defender, though of a faulty theology, writes: "*The Baptism in the Holy Spirit...* in the Pentecostal Movement, is spoken of constantly as a crucial topic: those who have not received it are encouraged to seek it; those who have already received it tend to measure their life from it as a decisive turning point and the real beginning of their new life in Christ".⁶

2. The Reporter of TIME Magazine, present at the press conference at the huge "charismatic" meeting at Notre Dame University, attended by more than 25,000 people including the priests, bishops, — even Cardinal Suenens — on June 18, 1973; writes.

"A 'Neo-Pentecostal' movement has developed over the past 20 years within the mainstream of Protestant churches — Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran — and is still spreading. While differences persist, all three groups believe in the necessity of a personal "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" in order to lead a fully Christian life. The initiate undergoes this "Spirit Baptism" by visiting a Pentecostal meeting at which other participants join in a laying on hands. For Catholics, this is not a new sacrament, nor does it supersede the rituals of Baptism and Confirmation; rather as a charismatic bishop says, it "makes them operative".⁷

3. Finally, from a long article, written by Deedee M. Siytangco, we quote: "Only when he (the new charismatic) gets "in" through his Baptism in the Spirit can he begin to live a full Christian life".⁸

⁶ Edward D. O'Connor, C.S.C., *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1971, Pag. 215.

⁷ Time, New York, June, 1973, Pag. 57.

⁸ Deedee M. Siytangco, *Philippine Panorama*, The Sunday Magazine of The Bulletin Today, September 26, 1982, Pag. 34.

With these statements by the charismatics themselves, can this laying of hands, and the marvels attributed to it, be even considered to be a true act of religion? On the contrary, in Catholic theology it is a true act of superstition. And superstition is by itself opposed to the virtue of religion. St. Thomas calls it the "Superstition in observances", and modern theologians give it the name of "Vain Observance", which, by definition is a form of superstition which in order to obtain some spiritual effects uses means not suited to that purpose either by nature or by prescription of God or His Church. An example of the power given by God or the Church we have in the sacraments and also in the sacramentals. In this laying of hands, however, we have the perfect example of *vain observance*, where self-appointed men dare to confer no less sacred a thing than the very Holy Spirit Himself. An unthinkable pretense by inept men in dealing directly with God and the gifts of His salvation. Can we conceive a greater offense against the virtue of Christian religion?

Also, the expression attributed above to a charismatic bishop, that this baptism may make operative the sacraments of baptism and confirmation of Catholics, cannot be said without blasphemy. It really insults Christ's institution of these two sacraments. Indeed, it is from the Lord's institution that the efficacy comes to the sacraments; not from this inept ceremony of Protestant invention.

Finally, let us not take too literally the words of Miss Siy-tangco: "Only when he gets 'in' through this baptism in Spirit can he begin to live a full Christian life". Would the good lady exclude from a full Christian life our Saint Teresa and the Little Flower and the thousands, nay myriads, who still populate this earth, and the others that fill the mansions of heaven without the slightest idea of this ceremony so grealy exalted by our charismatics?

6. *Sanity, theology and a bit of discretion*

We wish to close our short remarks with the words of the *Declaration on some Movements and Associations Forbidden to*

Clergy, recently issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 8 March 1982 which have been ordered for publication by the Holy Father:

"It is the conviction of the Holy See that the prudent and firm application of these norms will allow the true charisms, which the Holy Spirit never ceases to pour out upon the Church, to bring forth abundant fruits to the benefit of the Order of Priests, the ministerial priesthood and the whole people of God. Through the watchful and solicitous action of the Church's holy pastors, false charisms, which sometimes spread about and can lead some priests astray, will be exposed and completely rejected."⁹

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⁹ L'Osservatore Romano, 5-12 April, Pag. 4.