

He will Baptize you with the Holy Spirit

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by Simon Tugwell, O.P.

The most distinctive and controverted doctrine of the Pentecostals is that of the 'baptism in the Spirit'. This was the hallmark of the original Pentecostal movement, as it still is of all Pentecostal-inspired renewal in all the Churches, including, most recently, the Roman Catholic.

Essentially, the doctrine is this: after conversion (and 'water baptism'), there remains a second blessing, associated usually with the laying on of hands, in which one receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, experiencing for oneself what the first disciples experienced at Pentecost. Some manifestation, usually tongues, is expected; indeed, strict Pentecostals demand it—'no tongues, no baptism in the Spirit'. Thereafter a person should increasingly realize in his life that he has been 'endued with power from on high', he will know that he is 'led by the Spirit', he will expect to receive and, when necessary, to perform miracles, especially healing. The whole doctrine rests on an appeal to texts like Mark 16, 17–18, and the obvious passages in Acts (all the texts that respectable commentators like Chrysostom have had to explain away).

I have already argued that we must take the Pentecostal challenge seriously, though expressing some doubts about the propriety of 'Catholic Pentecostalism'.¹ Here I shall simply examine what they call 'baptism in the Spirit'. Without wishing at all to devalue the experience, I think it is essential, at least for us in the traditional Churches, to consider how far their doctrine of it is theologically and exegetically sound, and what precisely is the spiritual and psychological significance of the experience. Something must also be said about the gift of tongues.

The gospel begins with the appearance of John the Baptist, preaching a baptism of repentance, in view of the impending arrival of the Messiah who is to execute an eschatological baptism of judgment, in Spirit and fire. The New Testament shows us both how Jesus does fulfil this expectation and how, importantly, he doesn't. Even after the Resurrection the apostles are still thinking in terms of a dramatic and violent dénouement (Acts 1, 3); then suddenly at Pentecost there they are proclaiming that (contrary to all appearances) Jesus really is the Messiah, the judgment has taken place and the eschatological baptism in the form of 'this which you see and hear'. Therefore 'be baptized, and you too will receive the Holy Spirit' (cf. Acts 2, 38).

An important step in all the gospels is the baptism of Jesus.

¹'Catholics and Pentecostals', *New Blackfriars*, May 1971.

According to the Baptist's prophecy, Jesus would be the one who would baptize. Instead he comes to be baptized—the whole thing is upside down (Matt. 3, 14). There was an early Jewish Christian tradition that actually located here the baptism in Spirit and fire: as Jesus went down into the waters, 'there was fire kindled in the Jordan'. He escaped from the fire, through the descent of the Spirit. This finds echoes in the canonical gospels (Luke 12, 49f). Jesus's messiahship is exercised not in the execution of the baptism of judgment, but in submitting to it. We can see in the New Testament how the Baptist's prophecy about him baptizing, although retained, is not followed through (especially John 4, 1f).

Jesus does not undergo baptism simply in our stead. He is baptized in our midst, and we are to share in it with him (Mark 10, 38). His messiahship is shown precisely in that he, having passed through the waters of death and been raised up to receive the Spirit (Acts 2, 33), pours him out upon those who believe in him. At Pentecost the first disciples enter into his death and exaltation, and immediately go out to pass on the invitation: be baptized, and you will receive the Spirit. It is useful to notice the correlation between the beginning of Acts, the end of Matthew, and the appended conclusion of Mark: we are to see a close connexion between the exaltation of Jesus, the experience of Pentecost, and the preaching of baptism. St Paul further bears this out: unlike the other apostles, he had not lived with Jesus on earth; what Pentecost was for them, baptism was for him.

In fact, there are only two references in Acts to being 'baptized in the Spirit', and, at first sight, these appear to contradict what I am saying. Before his ascension Jesus recalls John's prophecy, and tells the disciples to expect its imminent fulfilment; and, after the episode at Cornelius' house, Peter cites the same prophecy. On both occasions, the Spirit is received apart from baptism. But Pentecost is a quite unique situation, concerning only those with whom Jesus had lived on earth; as the sequel makes clear, the extension of Pentecost is by way of baptism. Similarly the Cornelius story leads up, in fact, to the reception, for the first time, of Gentiles to baptism. It is as if St Luke knows that he has to do something with the Baptist's prophecy; having seen it safely through into Christian baptism, first for Jews, then for Gentiles, he can let it slip.

It is surely quite in keeping with this pattern in scripture that the Church has always applied the texts about baptizing in the Spirit to the sacrament of baptism. And I think we must face squarely the fact that Catholic theology is, frankly, almost exactly opposite to Pentecostal theology on this point. For Pentecostals, water baptism is a humanly governed act of faith, while the second blessing is the work of God alone. For us, the sacrament of baptism is the work of God alone, and as such a pure and perfect work, while the second blessing (or any subsequent religious experience), however blessed and momentous, is a work of co-operation between God and

man, a stage in the process of man's divinization by the Spirit of God, a part of that 'mixing' of the leaven into the human lump.

We may quote Augustine as a typical spokesman for the Catholic view. Basing himself on John 1, 33, he says that baptizing in the Spirit is a work reserved incommunicably to Christ alone. There is one Lord, one baptism. Therefore, whoever baptizes, it is the Lord who baptizes: 'whether Peter or Paul or Judas, it is He who baptizes', using the minister (as St Thomas will add) simply as an instrument. As the great Byzantine scholar, Nicholas Cabasilas, argues, baptism is a perfect and complete work, because of the complete perfection of the work of Calvary. If, therefore, the grace seems to be received in varying degrees, let us not blame the sacrament, but rather the recipient.

I think this can easily be misunderstood, where the full, traditional teaching about the sacraments has got lost. There has been a tendency in western Christianity to make a sharp separation between God's act and man's (if it's me, it isn't God, and vice versa). The older theology, including that of St Thomas, sees that any divine act in our lives is always also a human act. 'The Spirit bears witness *with our spirit*.' This is why we are bidden to be somewhat reserved in face of any religious experience of our own, however overwhelming; it will always be an experience of God *and us*. It is only in the human life of Jesus that there is a pure manifestation of God; it is in his dying and rising again that our redemption is, objectively, wrought. And this objective redemption is made available to us, quite objectively, in the sacraments of the Church; in them, as it were, that humanity, in which God is perfectly manifested, is extended down the ages. Where the rite is properly performed, there, by divine ordinance beyond anything we can control or defile, there is a perfect act of Christ. By contrast, any experience of our own depends upon our spiritual state. Catholic theology therefore reserves to the sacraments the absolute faith that here is a pure and perfect work of God, and denies this theological weight to any other religious manifestation.

'The kingdom of heaven is like a man scattering seed upon the ground; he goes to sleep, he gets up again, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain' (Mark 4, 26–8). The seed can grow even without our knowledge. If a sacrament is an act of God in Christ, a *real* act, then it does its work even if we feel nothing—provided we are not blocking it.

However, this is not to say that experience does not matter. If we read the New Testament, doesn't it rather suggest that all Christians are (not 'should be'; *are*) characterized by a kind of spiritual *experience*, an experience of being set free from law and fear and sin and even sickness and death; an experience of being set free from themselves? They apparently knew what St Paul was on

about when he appealed to them: 'Was it by works of the Law that you received the Spirit?' (Gal. 3, 2); or when St John talked of the way that we 'know' everything because of the 'anointing' we receive from God (I John 2, 20); 'in this we *know* that he dwells in us, from the Spirit which he gave us' (3, 24).

There is no reason to suppose that the early Christians were all that much more virtuous than most of us; the evidence is against it. But yet, they do seem to have known in their own experience the reality of the victory of Jesus Christ, the reality of the indwelling of God, of the Spirit who explores even the hidden things of God (I Cor. 2, 10). By virtue of their baptism, they seem to be given access to this whole world, a world we can only call 'contemplative', in that it rests, not simply on blind dutiful obedience to the precepts and teaching of the magisterium, but also on experience. (It goes without saying that they knew nothing of the modern tendency to oppose doctrine and mystical experience.)

Nor is this confined to the first generation. There is a little piece by a certain Jerome the Greek, who appears to be a monk, and may have lived any time from the fourth century, in which he answers the question, 'How do you know you were baptized at all? Perhaps your parents were secretly pagans.' 'I know it', he says, 'from the results. Isaiah says, "through fear of you, Lord, we conceived, we were in travail, and we gave birth to a Spirit of salvation" (26, 18 LXX), showing that we who have been enlightened through baptism have received the Holy Spirit. . . . All who have received the divine Spirit in themselves (lit. their womb) in holy baptism, are assured inwardly in their own heart that they have indeed been baptized, by the leaping and pricking of his grace, by the exultation and workings, by his, so to speak, jumping up and down in them. A woman does not just know by hearsay that she is pregnant!' Jerome claims to be speaking for 'lots of people in the world' (i.e. not to mention monks).

The early Christians were not specially more virtuous than we are; yet in one sense, their position was different. They had all, in a much more positive sense than most of us, renounced the world. They had not, of course, geographically separated themselves; they did not constitute a ghetto. Far from it. But they had detached themselves from the ambitions of the world, from the satisfactions and desires of the world, from the 'language' of the world, as St John of Avila puts it—they did not allow the world to determine their understanding of life, they did not look for the meaning of things in the common assumptions and prejudices of men. They had left behind the security of simply belonging to their age, being 'men of their time'. They had, in however small a degree, become the 'bearers of essentially different needs, goals and satisfactions' (Fergus Kerr, O.P., paraphrasing Herbert Marcuse). They had let Christ actually transform them; they had abandoned the world of

darkness, in favour of the wonderful light of Christ.

The total picture that emerges can perhaps be resumed under the one word conversion, *metanoia*, which, as St Luke especially brings out, is both the prerequisite for entry into the Kingdom, and itself the first fruit of the Kingdom. Quite literally, it is the 'new heart' which is implanted in us by the Spirit, which is, indeed, from one point of view, actually the Spirit himself indwelling us (Ezek. 36, 26f); it is 'the mind of Christ' (I Cor. 2, 16). Baptism does not, certainly, consist of a spiritual experience, but it involves a man, clearly, in a whole new dimension of experience. From the very earliest days of the Church, it contained, at least tacitly, a definitive renunciation of Satan, a dropping out (*apotaxis*) from the ranks of the Prince of this world, and all his pomps (including the mystical ones—for 'the devil hath his contemplatives', as *The Cloud of Unknowing* warns us). It includes the confession of faith that 'Jesus is Lord and Christ', and this confession is embodied in one's life by a real abdication of care (this is a great theme of Matthew's), care to justify oneself (that is now Christ's business), care to look after one's interests in the world, or even to defend one's reputation or property. Although it is often convenient to distinguish between the work of grace by which we personally are saved, and that by which we are endowed with charismatic gifts, ultimately we must recognize that there is only the one reality, which is the mystery of Christ, the economy of God's redeeming plan for mankind. In baptism we are caught up into this whole divine economy, the whole reality of Christ. Whether we manifest this in the moral transformation of our lives, in contemplative wisdom, in supernatural prayer, or in the working of miracles, in all these it is the same Spirit, the same Lord, working all in all. We cannot pick and choose. 'He who does not gather with me, is scattering' (Matt. 12, 30). In the last analysis, there is no room for partitions and categories; Christ is not divided, and our life in Christ is also his life in us.

For the New Testament and for the early Church, all that Pentecostals understand by 'baptism in the Spirit' is referred, quite strictly and simply, to what it means to be a Christian at all. The experience of the Spirit is not subsequent to that of conversion and faith; the experience of Pentecost is identical with the baptismal confession that 'Jesus is Lord' (and how often the New Testament warns us against Pentecostal manifestations divorced from this confession!).

Now, the Pentecostal doctrine is intended to cope with a situation in which we must recognize—as indeed we must—that there are genuine Christians who have not had any kind of Pentecost experience. Somewhere along the line, conversion (baptism) and the *experience* of the Spirit in his fullness have got separated. We shall be considering this more fully in my next article; here let me just offer a few preliminary remarks.

One beneficial result of our enquiry is that it has really driven us back to fundamentals. Pentecostal talk often, I think, obscures the real issue; it strikes people as exotic, it appears to set up two classes of Christians on a highly tendentious basis, its exegesis is idiosyncratic and contrary to general scholarship . . . all this gives too easy a way of evading the real issue. But the whole thing looks rather different when we see that what is at stake is the very reality of our Christian initiation, our baptism. Those who are content to have been validly baptized, without aspiring to supernatural awareness or to a ministry and witness in the power of the Spirit, indeed without expecting to be 'changed' (in Symeon's oft-repeated and pregnant sense), those, in fact, who only know 'from hearsay' that they have been baptized at all, they should have occasion to sit up and think, shouldn't they?

On the other hand, those who do aspire to the experience of the Spirit are also confronted with some necessary home truths. Another point of Pentecostal doctrine is to ensure that no one approaches the experience of the Spirit without first really committing himself to Jesus Christ. For there can be Pentecostal phenomena (phenomena 'in Spirit', as the New Testament calls them) that are not from God, that are not part of the mystery of God's will in Christ. Where only part of Pentecostalism (that which concerns the 'baptism in the Spirit') has been adopted, as by many renewal movements in the historic Churches, the necessary safeguards easily get lost. It could be all too easy for Catholics who have not had a 'Protestant-type' conversion experience to enter into a Pentecostal experience without a proper commitment of faith, without the determination that Christ is to be the interpretative context for anything that happens. There can be an experience of 'Spirit' that is not an experience of the exalted Christ, that neither issues from nor into *metanoia* (and I repeat, *metanoia* cannot be deliberately produced, it is itself the first fruit of the Spirit; it is not that a man *says* he has committed himself to Christ. It somehow *shows*, whether the Lord has set his seal upon him or not). There should be no question of seeking anything *extra*, anything other than the basic reality of the salvation wrought in Christ, and our incorporation into Christ in baptism. There are no 'perks', there must be no looking for 'experiences', only a desire to see the work of Christ made real (which includes experience) in us and through us. 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. For thine *is* the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.'