

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Two Catholic Schools of Theological Interpretation

- discussed in the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue 1998-2006 -

On this document

The Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue 1998-2006 paid much attention to Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In this dialogue 'On becoming a Christian', they have 'attempted to understand how an individual moves from his or her initial entry into the Christian life to being a fully active member of the church' (nr.5). Subjects were: Christian initiation and conversion, faith, formation, discipleship, experience in Christian life and baptism in the Holy Spirit.

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So, after Biblical Perspectives on Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Patristic Perspectives on Baptism in the Holy Spirit follows:

c. Two Schools of Theological Interpretation

227. Two major schools of theological interpretation emerged among Catholic charismatics concerning Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Some exchanged that term for others such as 'release of the Spirit' or "'renewal in the Spirit' in order to maintain a clear distinction between this aspect of the renewal and the sacrament of baptism.

228. The Malines Document (1974), an important Catholic statement on the Charismatic Movement, underlined the importance of experience: "When the Spirit given at initiation emerges into consciousness, there is frequently a perception of concrete presence" (III G 4). It established a fundamental relation between Christian Initiation and receiving the Holy Spirit: "The decisive coming of the Spirit by virtue of which one becomes a Christian is related to the celebration of Christian Initiation

- (baptism, confirmation, and eucharist). Christian Initiation is the effective sign of the Spirit's bestowal" (III F I). It pointed to the insights of early Christian communities with respect to the reception of the Holy Spirit: "There is evidence that in many of the early Christian communities, persons not only asked for and received the Spirit during the celebration of initiation, but they expected that the Spirit would demonstrate his power by the transformation he would effect in their lives" (III F 1).
229. The document went on to indicate the view of early Christian communities in regard to charisms: "Further, the early Christian Churches expected that the power of the Spirit would come to visibility along the full spectrum of his charisms in the community, which included, but by no means was limited to, such charisms as helping, administration, prophecy, and tongues (1 Cor 12:28; cf. Rom 12:6-8)" (III F I).
230. For the Malines text, therefore, Baptism in the Holy Spirit is integral to Christian Initiation. It is to be understood as part of the fullness of Christian Initiation, as one expression of the total reality of initiation. Baptism in the Holy Spirit belongs to the church at a fundamental level.
231. This approach has two advantages: First, Baptism in the Holy Spirit is placed within a sacramental context; as part of Christian Initiation, it can be understood as a fundamental category of Christian life. Second, linking Baptism in the Holy Spirit with initiation relates the sacraments of initiation to the fullness of Christian life, which is based on spiritual experience and the openness to receive more gifts through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, Baptism in the Holy Spirit is "integral" and "normative". But another question is raised as a result of taking this position. Is the specific character of Baptism in the Holy Spirit sufficiently recognised as a particular form of spiritual experience?
232. Another interpretation, one of those expounded in *The Spirit Gives Life*, a paper approved by the German Bishops' Conference in 1987, indicated that: "A Christian does not possess God's Spirit in a static manner. Rather, the person lives in the continuous 'sending forth' of the Spirit by the love of God. That is why we can always go on praying, 'Send forth your Spirit'. A new kind of experience of the Spirit can therefore be understood as a new 'outpouring' of the Spirit by God." In this sense, "alongside the continuous indwelling of the Spirit through baptism and confirmation – occasional renewals, or new sendings forth of the Spirit [occur] by which a Christian 'is enabled to perform some action of grace or is placed in a new state of grace'" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.q 43 a.6). In this sense, experiences of the Spirit can be explained as a new receiving of the Holy Spirit without denying reference to the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and eucharist.
233. The advantage of this approach is that it clearly emphasizes the particularity of God's guidance and his gifts. This approach has sacramental aspects, since all spiritual life has its roots in the sacraments. The individual sacraments give shape to the church,

which Catholics consider to be “the universal sacrament of salvation” (LG 48). In this context, the sacraments of initiation certainly are of fundamental significance. But God’s bestowal of grace and of charismatic gifts need not be restricted only to the sacraments. As the New Testament points out, “the wind [Spirit] blows where it chooses” (Jn 3:7-8), distributing freely a variety of gifts for the building up of the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-13; Eph 4:11-17).

234. Both positions agree on the essentials of a dedicated Christian life and what here can be said to be “integral” and “normative”, and on the fundamental meaning of the sacraments, especially those of Christian Initiation. Both agree on the importance of being open to the Holy Spirit and his gifts, “whether extraordinary or simple and humble”. Both agree on the importance of openness to the charismatic dimension of the church, to the transformative and life changing power of the Holy Spirit and to the fullness of Christian life. Both agree on the importance of spiritual experience and, at the same time, that Christian life, as often had been said, is in no way “a progress from peak experience to peak experience” or is “dominated by unusual experiences” but that, on the contrary, “life is lived mostly in the valleys. Often in the desert”.¹ In that sense both agree that Baptism in the Holy Spirit is part of ecclesial life. Thus, the two different approaches or positions do not appear to be irreconcilable. However, they clearly disagree on the understanding of

Baptism in the Holy Spirit, especially concerning whether this term should be used to specify a particular spiritual experience in the Pentecostal Movement and in the Charismatic Renewal, or whether this should be understood as normative for Christian initiation.

235. Both interpretations attempt to be faithful to Catholic tradition and both complement the charismatic experience with the church’s theological and spiritual traditions. They both emphasize that the charismatic dimension is integral to the building up of the church and to the fullness of Christian life. Charisms, free gifts of the Holy Spirit, “whatever their character – sometimes it is extraordinary, such as the gift of miracles or of tongues – ... are oriented toward sanctifying grace, and are intended for the common good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church” (CCC 2003).

236. Catholics are grateful for the enrichment of their spiritual experience by their historic interaction with classical Pentecostals, their experience and doctrine. In the meantime, Catholics, while witnessing to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the church, continue to pray for a ‘New Pentecost’ following the lead of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council,. They also renew faith in the Holy Spirit as traditionally expressed in the beautiful Pentecost Sequence hymn *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (Come Holy Spirit) and the Litany of the Holy Spirit.

237. We believe that it is fitting in this dialogue to conclude this section on Catholic understanding of Baptism

¹ Cf. Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, Collegeville, Minnesota 1994, p. 360.

in the Holy Spirit with the prayers lifted up to God on the morning before Pentecost and the evening of Pentecost in the Liturgy of the Hours. Respectively they are: “We have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. With all who are baptized, let us give glory to the Lord, and ask

him: Lord Jesus, give us your Spirit to make us holy.” “You [God the Father] desire the unity of all Christians through one Baptism in the Holy Spirit, make all who believe one in heart and soul. Send your Holy Spirit into the Church.”

The whole report *On becoming a Christian* is published in print in 2009 by the Vatican, both in English and French, in *Information service* nr. 129 (2008/III). You can order it from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, vcaroli@christianunity.va. Price: 5 euro. USA: 5 dollar.

This English text and the French translation [plus commentary] are also on the website of the Vatican: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index_pentecostals.htm

The whole report *On becoming a Christian* (50.800 words on 99 pages) is in English a free download on www.stucom.nl nr. 0203uk.

November 30th, 2007, Cecil M. Robeck, co-chair of this dialogue, presented this report in Amsterdam (see his text: 0205uk on www.stucom.nl). He gave the final draft for publication on www.stucom.nl (<http://www.stucom.nl/algemeen/alldocuk.htm> leads to the English list on www.stucom.nl).

IN SHORT

Two Catholic Schools of Theological Interpretation

1. The Malines Document (1974), underlined the importance of experience: “When the Spirit given at initiation emerges into consciousness, there is frequently a perception of concrete presence” (228). Baptism in the Holy Spirit is placed within a sacramental context; as part of Christian Initiation (231).

All the Malines Documents are on www.stucom.nl [See overview 0238uk (English) and 0238 (Dutch)]

2. *The Spirit Gives Life*, a paper approved by the German Bishops’ Conference in 1987, indicated that: “A Christian does not possess God’s Spirit in a static manner. (...) A new kind of experience of the Spirit can therefore be understood as a new ‘outpouring’ of the Spirit by God.” In this sense, “alongside the continuous indwelling of the Spirit through baptism and confirmation – occasional renewals, or new sendings forth of the Spirit [occur] by which a Christian ‘is enabled to perform some action of grace or is placed in a new state of grace’” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.q 43 a.6) (232). God’s bestowal of grace and of charismatic gifts need not be restricted only to the sacraments (233).

For this second school of interpretation, see dr. N. Baumert on www.stucom.nl 0274uk and 0274de.

Thus, the two different approaches or positions do not appear to be irreconcilable. However, they clearly disagree on the understanding of Baptism in the Holy Spirit, especially concerning whether this term should be used to specify a particular spiritual experience in the Pentecostal Movement and in the Charismatic Renewal, or whether this should be understood as normative for Christian initiation (234).

Kees Slijkerman,
The Netherlands

This is document 0228uk on www.stucom.nl