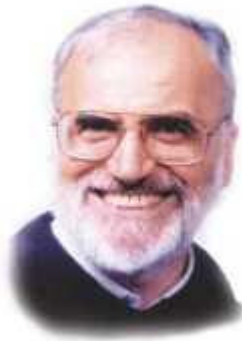




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Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM



SUMMARY: The Baptism in the Spirit is not a sacrament, but it is related to several sacraments. The Baptism in the Spirit makes real and in a way renews Christian initiation. At the beginning of the Church, Baptism was administered to adults who converted from paganism and who, made on the occasion of Baptism, an act of faith and a free and mature choice. Today it is substituted instead by intermediary parents or godparents. In this situation, rarely, or never, does the baptized person ever reach the stage of proclaiming in the Holy Spirit "Jesus is Lord". And until one reaches this point, everything else in the Christian life remains out of focus

and immature. Miracles no longer happen and we experience what Jesus did in Nazareth: "Jesus could not perform many miracles because of their lack of faith" (Mt. 13.58). The Baptism in the Spirit effectiveness in reactivating baptism consists in this: finally man contributes his part - namely, he makes a choice of faith, prepared in repentance that allows the work of God to set itself free and to emanate all its strength. It is as if the plug is pulled and the light is switched on. The gift of God is finally "untied" and the Spirit is allowed to flow like a fragrance in the Christian life.

Before talking about the Baptism in the Spirit, it is important to try and understand what the Renewal in the Spirit is all about. After the Second Vatican Council, many things in the Church's life were renewed - the liturgy, pastoral care, canon law code, the constitutions of the religious orders and their dress. Although all these things are important, they are only external things and woe to us if we stop there and think the task is finished, because it is not structures but souls that are important to God. "It is in men's souls that the Church is beautiful," writes St. Ambrose, and therefore it is in men's souls that she must make herself beautiful.

God Is Author and Power

The Renewal is a renewal in which God, not man, is the principle author. "I, not you," says God, "make all things new" (Rev 21:5); "My Spirit - and He alone - may renew the face of the earth" (see Psalm 104:30). From the religious point of

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view, we tend to view things from a ptolemaic perspective: at the foundation there are our efforts - organization, efficiency, reforms, goodwill - with the earth here as the center which God comes to strengthen and crown, by His grace and our effort.

We must - at this point the Word of God cries out - "give the power back to God" (Psalm 68:35) because "the power belongs to God" (Psalm 62:12). For too long we have usurped this power of His from God, by managing it as if it were ours, as if it was up to us to "govern" the power of God. We have to totally change our perspective. That is, to acknowledge simply that without the Holy Spirit, we cannot do anything, not even say, Jesus is Lord!" (I Cor 12:3).

Baptism in the Spirit and the Sacrament of Baptism

The Baptism in the Spirit is not a sacrament, but it is related to a sacrament, to several sacraments in fact - to the sacraments of Christian initiation. The Baptism in the Spirit makes real and in a way renews Christian initiation. The primary relationship is with the Sacrament of Baptism. In fact, this experience is called the Baptism in the Spirit by English-speaking people.

We believe that the Baptism in the Spirit makes real and revitalizes our baptism. To understand how a sacrament which was received so many years ago, usually immediately after our birth could suddenly come back to life and emanate so much energy, as often happens through the Baptism in the Spirit, it is important to look at our understanding of sacramental theology.

Catholic theology recognizes the concept of a valid but tied sacrament. A sacrament is called tied if the fruit that should accompany it remains bound because of certain blocks that prevent its effectiveness. An extreme example of this is the Sacrament of Matrimony or Holy Orders received in the state of mortal sin. In such circumstances these sacraments cannot grant any grace to people until the obstacle of sin is removed through penance. Once this happens the sacrament is said to live again thanks to the indelible character and irrevocability of the gift of God: God remains faithful even if we are unfaithful because He cannot deny Himself (see Timothy 2:13).

In the case of baptism what is it that causes the fruit of the sacrament to stay tied? The sacraments are not magical rituals that act mechanically, without the person's knowledge or disregarding any response on his part. Their effectiveness is the fruit of a synergy or cooperation between divine omnipotence - in reality the grace of Christ or the Holy Spirit and human freedom, because as St. Augustine said, "The one who created you without your cooperation, will not save without your cooperation."

The *opus operatum* of baptism, namely, God's part or grace, has several aspects - forgiveness of sins, the gift of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity (these, however, only as a seed), divine sonship - all of which are operated through the effective action of the Holy Spirit. But what does the *opus operantis* in baptism - namely, man's part, consist of? It consists of faith! Whoever believes

and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16). At the side of baptism, therefore, there is another element: the faith of man. "To all who received Him He gave the power to become children of God: to those who believe in His name" (John 1:13).

Baptism is like a divine seal put on the faith of man: having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and having believed in it, you have received (of course, in baptism) the seal of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1:13)

Baptism and Confirmation of Faith

At the beginning of the Church, Baptism was such a powerful event and so rich in grace that there was no need normally of a new effusion of the Spirit like we have today. Baptism was ministered to adults who converted from paganism and who, properly instructed, were in the position to make, on the occasion of baptism, an act of faith and a free and mature choice. It is sufficient to read the mistagogic catechesis on baptism attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem to become aware of the depth of faith to which those waiting for baptism were led. In substance, they arrived at baptism through a true and real conversion, and thus for them baptism was a real washing, a personal renewal, and a rebirth in the Holy Spirit.

The favorable circumstances that allowed baptism, at the origins of the Church, to operate with so much power was that the grace of God and man's response met at the same time, and there was a perfect synchronization

Infant Baptism in Non-Christian Environment

But now this synchronization has been broken, as we are baptized as infants, and little by little this aspect of the free and personal act of faith no longer happens. It was substituted instead by a decision by intermediary parents or godparents. When a child grew up in a totally Christian environment, this faith still could flourish. even though at a slower rate. Now, however, this is no longer the case and our spiritual environment is even worse than the one at the time of the Middle Ages. Not that there is no normal Christian life, but this is now the exception rather than the rule.

In this situation, rarely, or never, does the baptized person ever reach the stage of proclaiming in the Holy Spirit, "Jesus is Lord." And until one reaches this point, everything else in the Christian life remains out of focus and immature. Miracles no longer happen, and we experience what Jesus did in Nazareth: "Jesus could not perform many miracles because of their lack of faith." (Mt 13. 58)

God's Will

Here, then, is what I feel is the significance of the Baptism in the Spirit. It is God's answer to this malfunctioning that has grown up in the Christian life in the Sacrament of Baptism.

It is an accepted fact that over the last few years there has been some concern on the part of the Church, among the bishops, that the Christian sacraments, especially baptism, are being administered to people who will not make any use

of them in life. As a result, it has even been suggested that baptism should not be administered unless there are some minimum guarantees that it will be cultivated and valued by the child in question. For one should not throw pearls to dogs, as Jesus said, and baptism is a pearl, because it is the fruit of the blood of Christ.

But it seems that God was concerned about this situation even before the Church was, and raised up here and there in the Church movements aimed at renewing Christian initiation in adults. The Charismatic Renewal is one of these movements and in it the principle grace is, without doubt, linked to the Baptism of the Spirit and to what comes before it.

Release and Confirmation of Faith

It's effectiveness in reactivating baptism consists in this: finally man contributes his part - namely, he makes a choice of faith, prepared in repentance that allows the work of God to set itself free and to emanate all its strength. It is as if the plug is pulled and the light is switched on. The gift of God is finally "untied" and the Spirit is allowed to flow like a fragrance in the Christian life.

In addition to the renewal of the grace of baptism, the Baptism in the Spirit is also a confirmation of one's own baptism, a deliberate "yes" to it, to its fruit and its commitments, and as such it is also similar to Confirmation too. Confirmation being the sacrament that develops, confirms, and brings to completion the work of baptism. From it, too, comes that desire for greater involvement in the apostolic and missionary dimension of the Church that is usually noted in those who receive the Baptism in the Spirit. They feel more inclined to cooperate with the building up of the Church, to put themselves at her service in various ministries both clerical and lay, to witness for Christ -to do all those things that recall the happening of Pentecost and which are actuated in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The Baptism of the Spirit is not the only occasion known within the Church for this reviving of the sacraments of initiation. There is, for example, the renewal of the baptismal promises in the Easter vigil, and there are the spiritual exercises, and the religious professions, sometimes called a "second baptism." and at the sacrament level there is Confirmation.

It is also not difficult to discover in the lives of the saints, the presence of a spontaneous effusion, especially on the occasion of their conversion. The difference with the Baptism in the Spirit, however, is that it is open to all the people of God, small and great, and not only to those privileged ones who do the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises or make a religious profession.

The Will of God in History

Where does this extraordinary force that we experienced when we were Baptized in the Spirit come from? What we are talking about is not just some theory, but something that we ourselves have experienced and therefore can say with John, "What we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what our hands

have touched, this we also announce to you, so that you too be in communion with us." (see I John 1:1-11). The explanation of this force is in the will of God - because God was pleased to renew the Church today by this means - and this is enough.

There are certainly some biblical precedents, like the one told in Acts 8:14-17, when Peter and John, having heard that Samaria welcomed the Word of God, went there, prayed for them, and laid hands on them so that they could receive the Holy Spirit. But these biblical precedents, are not sufficient to explain the vastness and depth of the contemporary manifestation of the effusion of the Spirit.

The explanation therefore is in God's plan. We could say, by paraphrasing a famous saying of the Apostle Paul: Because Christians, with all their organization, were not able to transmit the power of the Spirit, God was pleased to renew the believers through the foolishness of the Baptism in the Spirit. In fact theologians look for an explanation and responsible people for moderation, but simple souls touch with their hands the power of Christ in the Baptism of the Spirit" (1Cor 12:1-24)

We men, and in particular we men of the Church, tend to limit God in His freedom: we tend to insist that He follows a compulsory pattern (the so called channels of grace) and we forget that God is a torrent that breaks loose and creates its own path and that the Spirit blows where and how he wants (notwithstanding the role of the teaching of the Church to discern what actually comes from the Spirit and what does not come from Him). What does the Baptism of the Spirit consist of and how does it work? In the Baptism of the Spirit there is a secret, mysterious move of God that is His way of becoming present, in a way that is different for each one because only He knows us in our inner part and how to act upon our unique personality. There is also the external community part which is the same for everyone and consists mainly of three things: brotherly love, laying on of hands, and prayer. These are non-sacramental but simply ecclesiastic elements.

Holy Spirit Proceeding from the Father and the Son

Where does the grace we experience in the Baptism of the Spirit come from? From those around us? No! From the person who receives it? No! It comes from God! We can only say that such grace is related to baptism, because God acts always with coherence and faithfulness and He does not do and undo. He honors the commitments and institutions of Christ. One thing is certain - that it is not the brothers who impart the Holy Spirit, but they do invoke the Holy Spirit on the person. The Spirit cannot be given by any man, not even the Pope or a bishop, because no man possesses by himself the Holy Spirit. Only Jesus may give the Holy Spirit; all the others do not possess the Holy Spirit, but rather are possessed by Him. As to the manner of this grace, we may speak of a new coming of the Holy Spirit, of a new mission by the Father through Jesus Christ, or a new anointing corresponding to a new degree of grace.

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Baptism of the Holy Spirit

While Jesus was in their company he told them not to leave Jerusalem. 'You must wait', he said, 'for the promise made by my Father, about which you have heard me speak: John, as you know, baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and within the next few days.' Acts 1:4-5

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth.' Acts 1:8

From the Apostle Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost: 'The Jesus we speak of has been raised by God, as we can all bear witness. Exalted thus at God's right hand, he received the Holy Spirit from the Father, as was promised, and all that you now see and hear flows from him.' Acts 2:32-33

What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? It is an experience of God present in the person of the Holy Spirit. It is an experience required by Jesus for all of His disciples, and as such, is one of the seven Sacraments that our Church bestows on and requires of all the faithful - Confirmation - the receiving of the Holy Spirit. As with all the Sacraments, it is bestowed with faith, hope, and love. Faith, that in fact God is acting to impart a special grace to the person receiving; hope, that the persons receiving will indeed open their heart and mind to receive all that God would have them receive from the Sacrament; and love, that entrusts to God the outcome of the Sacrament.

As we look at this question, we pray that the Holy Spirit will take these efforts in words, as poor and inadequate as they are, and use them to bless the reader with a deeper experience of the love of God and the power of God available to each of His children. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Let us begin by establishing the basis of understanding from what we have been taught in the Scriptures by our Church over the centuries since the resurrection of Jesus. God became man in the person of Jesus in order to pay the price of our redemption from the hold of Satan. As revealed in Genesis, God had given the entire world over to the responsibility of man in the person of Adam. The action of our first human father caused him to be separated from God by his own free choice, and consequently all human children would be born into a family that was separated from God. But more than that, we learned that when the separation from God occurred, we came under the dominion and rule of Satan as children of a human father ruled by Satan.

Even now in the world, if a citizen of one country wants to become a citizen of another, the person must make the request and follow the laws necessary, or the

new citizenship is not granted. If the person is a criminal trying to avoid the law in their native land, the new country may not be able to grant citizenship. This may help us to understand why God knew He must become a human being (limited by humanity, and subject to all the temptations of humanity) in order to qualify as a worthy substitute for the punishment due to Adam, and every child of Adam.

The Scriptures put it this way, and our Church has taught it as the Doctrine of Original Sin: one person sinned, and many were made sinners, and yet one Man - Jesus - did not sin. Jesus willingly laid down his life to pay the penalty for the one man Adam who did sin. Since Jesus paid the penalty for Adam, the scale of justice is balanced and the Devil has no right to hold Adam separated from God any longer.

But then what about you and me? God's plan for all of us was effective in Jesus. Since none of us had any choice when we were born into this world about whether or not we wanted to be separated from God by our birth into the family of Adam, God could now open the door for our free choice in Christ Jesus. So God summed up all humanity that would ever be born from the family of Adam into Adam. Therefore when Jesus paid the penalty for the one person, He thereby paid the price for all persons. Now God's provision for redeeming us from the ownership of Satan by our birth could be received by any human that would receive the gift of Jesus as our substitute. Jesus became our substitute in full payment for our life of sin that deserved the penalty of death.

Why did we deserve a death penalty? Consider that your father gave you a legacy for your children of 1000 acres of land for each child. Then you decided you wanted to spend the money that the land would bring, so you sold your children's birthright. When your children were born they had lost their birthright, not due to their own action, but to yours! Now consider that your father is still alive, and his plan for blessing your children has not changed. So he must now go to the legal owner and pay the necessary price to redeem the land back. Then if any of your children come to your father, doesn't he have the right to give the legacy to them for their enjoyment? So God did this in Jesus. Otherwise, God would have been unrighteous to demand back something that had rightfully passed to the ownership of another without paying the full price. So now it is possible for God to give us the right to have fellowship with Him in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Redeemer. Now we are each faced with the responsibility of a choice.

But let us look at another aspect of this wonderful plan of God's for a moment in order to understand what our choice must be. Let's say you were born into the Smith family. After you grew up, you decided you did not like the name of Smith, so you changed your name to Jones. Even though you have a new name you are still in the Smith family, and the bloodline of your father is still in your veins. You may try to change your name a hundred times, but you will always be in the Smith family until you die. So it is with each of us born into the family of our human father, Adam.

We separated from God by birth. We are sinners not because of what we do, but by our birth. It is not our sin that makes us sinners, but we sin because it is in our nature as humans, as sinners by birth. Fish swim because it is in their nature to swim, and we sin because it is in our nature to sin!

God knew this and so He made provision in Jesus for us to be able to choose to enter into the death that Jesus died for us and thereby pass out of the control of the nature of sin that Satan had held us under. We see the basic sin with which we are tempted is that **we want to do things our way in our time and not need to depend on God**. This is the 'pride of life' that ensnared our first father, Adam, and it lives in us. So there is a power in our nature that wants to sin; God needs to provide for us a greater power if we are going to be able to resist the daily temptations to live independent from Him. This is God's secret revealed through the Church by the Holy Spirit - Christ Jesus will become our life through the ongoing ministry of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now we need to understand the word 'baptism'. 'Baptism' is a Greek word that can be understood in this way: a sunken wooden ship is a baptized ship. The wood is both completely immersed in the water, and the water has permeated into the very fiber of the wood. Not only has the use of the ship been severely altered, but the very substance of the ship is transformed. As we begin to understand this word 'baptism', we can see the gift of life that is given in the Sacrament of Baptism.

By faith in the active power of God, we receive an immersion into the death of Jesus Christ at the Sacrament of Baptism. The blood that He poured out of His veins became the substance that washed away all our actions of sin, and the death that He dies allows us to be free of the nature of sin which made us sin in the first place. We are sunk into Him, into His substitutionary death for each of us, and we are free to be reconciled with our real father, God.

In Baptism, we are given new life in Him through our identification with Him in His resurrection. We are born again from the dead. All of this happens in fact at the time of our Sacrament of Baptism, and it is received by our parents by faith in God in our behalf. They know that someday God will bring into our experience that which they had entrusted to Him by faith. Our full experience of this new life awaits our willingness to enter into that death to our own self-centered lives, in order that we also can experience His resurrection with Him.

All the facts are now in place in our lives, and God waits for us to come to Him in Christ Jesus to claim our new birthright. At this point, we can see both what the 'baptism' in the Holy Spirit is, and why Jesus would insist upon the disciples waiting for the empowerment before beginning their task of being His witnesses. What about this 'baptism' in, or with the Holy Spirit, or perhaps we could also call it the Spirit of Holiness? Again, our Father God is so very thorough in His love for us. God knew that we would not be able to hold onto this new life in Christ that He had given us in the death and resurrection of Christ without the power, or ability, of the Holy Spirit active in our lives. So God gives the Holy Spirit to Jesus

for Him to give to all who would come to Him as their ability to follow Him each day of their lives. To be baptized into or with the Spirit of Holiness is to allow ourselves to be completely filled in our hearts and minds with Holiness, and to **give over control of our lives to the Holy Spirit.**

The plan of God in our lives is the same as in the life of Jesus when He walked the earth in the limitations of humanity. It was the Holy Spirit that caused Him to be conceived and was with Him as He grew and matured in obedience. The Holy Spirit empowered Him to walk in ministry in Israel, suffer, be crucified on our behalf, and be willing to die so that His Father's plan might take full effect for all of us. This same Spirit of Holiness that enabled Him is now given by Him to enable us to walk in holiness of life with Him and in Him and for Him.

Holiness is most simply understood as single-mindedness in wanting God to have the joy of guiding and enabling our lives. Now **all this is bestowed by faith at the time of our Confirmation, but few people really experience this empowering at that time of their lives.** All the things of God are first received by faith in the facts He has spoken. Our experience of these facts will follow as we continue in faith to believe that what God has said is really true.

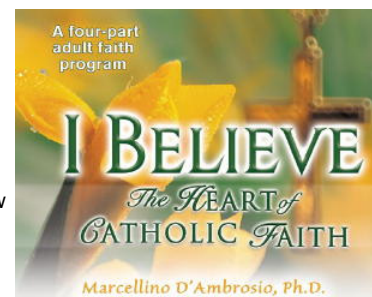
Over the ages, our Church has proclaimed and continues to proclaim the personal responsibility of all human beings to choose for themselves the plan of God - or the gifts so lavishly given cannot be experienced. The basic Sacraments of initiation into our faith have been given to all of us, and yet without mature adult understanding and acceptance, we do not experience the full benefit of all that God has provided for us in the facts of these Sacraments. Let us not continue in our ignorance that is so costly to our everyday life of grace in Jesus Christ, but come to Him from whom all blessings flow - Jesus, the Christ, the Anointed of God, our Savior, our Redeemer, and humbly ask Him to immerse us into His Spirit of Holiness.

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