

18. WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

Fr Luigi Gioia
Theologian In Residence

1. We ended our last talk with a comparison between a model of the church in which belief in the Holy Spirit is *not* operative and another in which it is:

Without the Holy Spirit	With the Holy Spirit
2. We believe that in Jesus God has made himself known and has acted decisively in history.	3. We believe that the revelation and action of God in history works only to the extent that, like Jesus, we let ourselves to be continuously guided, inspired, and empowered <u>and disrupted</u> by the Holy Spirit.
4. Jesus is now risen and is not physically present among us any more.	5. The Risen Jesus remains among us in the power of the Holy Spirit.
6. The continuation of God's action is made possible in many ways: 7. We have the successors of the Apostles, Bishops and priests, who have a mandate to teach and guide in Jesus' name.	8. The people who receive a mandate to guide and teach (whether by apostolic succession or in other ways) draw their ability to do so only to the extent that they constantly let themselves to be led and inspired by the Holy Spirit, as Jesus did. No power or authority in the Church works by simple appointment or ordination, or authorization.
9. We have the Gospels which are the written testimony of the words and actions of Jesus.	10. Scripture is not the Word of God. Scripture can become "God who speaks to us now" (the Word) only if the same Spirit who inspired the authors of Scripture also inspire those who read it.
11. All we have to do is join the Church guided by the successors of the Apostles, receive and confess the right teaching, and put this teaching into practice.	12. Structures, teaching, doctrine, and activities are powerless unless the Church becomes a sign of God's love thanks to the Holy Spirit.
13. Now that Jesus is gone, the coming of the Kingdom of God <u>depends on us</u> , on what we do with Jesus' legacy.	14. The coming of the Kingdom of God remains fully God's action still now. Nothing of what we do can contribute to the coming of the Kingdom unless it is inspired, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is why the main role of pastors should be to rely on the gifts (charisms) of the Holy Spirit in Christian community, acknowledge them,

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	even when (which is often the case) they seem disruptive.
15. Baptism is seen more as a rite of initiation.	16. We are baptized in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: Baptism is a new creation (this is why in the Creed we confess that the Holy Spirit is “the giver of Life”), it our ‘anointment’ (like Jesus’ anointment): it is by the Holy Spirit that we are ‘immersed’ in God and we can act from God.
17. We believe that God helps us, gives us his grace – but in fact we do everything as all depended on us.	18. We believe that without the presence and action of the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. This is why the most important activity of the Church is discern where the Holy Spirit is guiding us.
19. A model in which the Holy Spirit is not God, or the belief in his divinity is not operative, becomes	20. A model in which the Holy Spirit is God, and the belief in his divinity is operative, becomes
21. Top-down	22. Bottom up (because based on recognizing and allowing the gifts or ‘charisms’ given by the Holy Spirit to all Christians)
23. Authority based	24. Participatory
25. Knowledge based	26. Love based

27. It is tempting to believe that for most of its history Christianity has operated according the former model (top-down, authority and knowledge based). More or less until the Reformation (1517 CE) the prevalent model was institutional, hierarchical (popes, bishops), sacramental, and propositional (councils, creeds, catechism) – and it can be argued that even the churches issued from the Reformation (Lutherans and Reformed) have had a tendency to follow a similar model.
28. And yet the classical (Roman Catholic and Orthodox) model of the church has always contained a potent disruptive element represented by monasticism and holiness:
- 28.1. The first monks were Christians who grew uncomfortable with the institutionalization of Christianity which followed the Edit of Constantine (313) and felt that the only way of leading a radical evangelical life was to go to the desert or embrace life in monastic communities (St Antony, St Pacomius etc...)
 - 28.2. The figure of monks or *starets* has remained essential to the identity and self-understanding of Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Cf. Zosima in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*).
 - 28.3. In Western Catholic Christianity, this evolved in the model of religious orders which have displayed almost always the same characteristics:
 - i. Whenever a need arises in society or with regards to evangelization which the institutional church is unable to recognize or deal with
 - ii. Women and men arise out of nowhere and claim to have received a call, a mission, a gift to deal with these issues
 - iii. They start spontaneously to gather in communities

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- iv. Initially they are seen with suspicion by the institutional church until their gift or 'charism' is acknowledged as authentic and given official recognition.
 - v. This is the history of Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits, Carmelites, and literally hundreds of religious orders of women which flourished especially from the 19th century on.
- 28.4. Besides monastic and religious vocations, the other disruptive element in Christianity has always been represented by *holiness*: at all times there have been women and men, lay people, priests, bishops, popes, theologians who have had a profound reforming impact on Christianity based on the exceptional qualities of their insights, gifts, love.
- 29. In Christian theology,
 - 29.1. this disruptive and reforming impetus,
 - 29.2. depending on individuals claiming to have received a special call and extraordinary gifts
 - 29.3. independently from ordinary institutional channels
 - 29.4. *has traditionally been seen as the mark of the presence and actions of the Holy Spirit.*
- 30. Of course, the action of the Holy Spirit is supposed to drive every aspect of the so-called 'institutional' church as well
 - 30.1. The very possibility of a person to believe and convert to Christianity is the result of the action of the Holy Spirit.
 - 30.2. Those who become priest, and eventually bishops or popes do so in response to a call, a vocation
 - 30.3. The deliberations of councils, especially in matters of doctrine are supposed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit
 - 30.4. The priestly role in the administration of sacraments, especially baptism and eucharist, are seen as purely instrumental: their 'efficacy' is attributed to the action of the Holy Spirit.
- 31. And yet, especially since the assimilation between political and religious order inaugurated by the Edit of Constantine in 313, there was a growing awareness that most of these same behaviors could be just as well driven by education and social conventions and pressures:
 - 31.1. Most people did not convert to Christianity but were born into it
 - 31.2. Embracing priestly ministry and progress in the hierarchy became a professional occupation and a career like in any other profession
 - 31.3. Matters of doctrine did not escape political pressure.
- 32. Hence the development of an increasingly naturalized institutional church in which the action of the Holy Spirit came to be perceived as *disruptive*.
- 33. However, until the 16th century, the almost universal feature of this *disruptive* influence of the Holy Spirit was that it was contained and integrated in the institutional framework: not without tensions, monastic communities, religious orders, and saints would acknowledge the authority of bishops and popes, subscribe₃

to the teaching of councils and of the magisterium, embrace the traditional sacramental order (especially baptism, eucharist, ordained ministry, and penitence).

34. What to think of the Reformation (Luther, Calvin) and of the ensuing fragmentation of Christianity? What about the new model of Christianity which emerged as a result - in which disruption was no more the exception but became the norm? Can Luther, Calvin, Henry VIII, Cranmer, the Puritans, Wesley also be seen as the expression of the action of the Holy Spirit in Christianity?
35. This question becomes all the more intriguing considering how most of the churches issued from the Reformation (Lutherans, Reformed, Anglican) quickly became institutionalized in their turn and started to exclude and persecute more radical fringes represented by Anabaptists, Non-Conformists, Puritans, Quakers, Enthusiasts and so on.
36. Some other factors contributed to an even messier landscape
 - 36.1. Owing to the pre-modern identification between political and religious order, religious disagreement led to centuries of ferocious wars and persecutions
 - 36.2. Partly as a reaction, Modernity (or the Enlightenment) looked for ways of
 - i. severing the political from the religious order
 - ii. by rejecting religious authority
 - iii. and replacing it with a quest for certainty based on reason and science (rational and empirical).
 - 36.3. This led to a quest for alternative models of establishing certainty in Christianity:
 - i. Authority and tradition had been invalidated or considered insufficient and unreliable
 - ii. Reason and science were perceived as inimical to faith
 - iii. Religion was increasingly privatized and excluded from the public sphere
37. Many embraced the difficult and uncertain task of a critical reevaluation of Christianity from the rational and empirical points of view.
38. Others looked for certainty elsewhere, namely in the *subjective, felt experience of God, accompanied by supernatural manifestations* which up to that moment seemed to have disappeared in mainstream Christianity (other than in the tradition of mysticism which remained marginal): prophecy, visions, healing, speaking in tongues.
39. Even when the historical connections are difficult to trace, there is a common thread uniting Anabaptists, Quakers, Enthusiasts, and the so called *Awakenings* or *Revivals* which took place especially in England, Wales, the Colonies which then became the United States from the 17th century to this day.
40. Throughout history, there have been several significant revivals, often associated with various religious movements and regions. These revivals have had a profound impact on the religious landscape and sometimes induced broader societal changes. Here are some of the main revivals:
 - 40.1. *First Great Awakening (1730s-1740s)*: The First Great Awakening was a religious revival that swept through the American colonies in the 18th century.

Prominent figures like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards played key roles in this revival, which emphasized emotional and personal religious experiences, repentance, and conversion. It led to the growth of evangelicalism and the establishment of new religious denominations in America.

- 40.2.** *Second Great Awakening (early 19th century):* The Second Great Awakening was a series of revivals that occurred in the United States during the early 19th century. It was characterized by camp meetings, emotional worship, and a strong emphasis on individual conversion and social reform. The movement had a lasting impact on American religious and social life and contributed to the spread of various Christian denominations.
- 40.3.** *Welsh Revival (1904-1905):* The Welsh Revival was a religious awakening that took place in Wales in the early 20th century, led by Evan Roberts. It was marked by fervent prayer meetings, mass conversions, and significant social change. The revival had a profound impact on Welsh society and inspired similar movements in other parts of the world.
- 40.4.** *Azusa Street Revival (1906-1915):* The Azusa Street Revival, led by William J. Seymour, was a pivotal event in the early Pentecostal movement in Los Angeles. It emphasized the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of spiritual gifts, particularly speaking in tongues. The Azusa Street Revival is considered the birthplace of modern Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity.
- 40.5.** *Charismatic Renewal (1960s-present):* While not a single revival event, the Charismatic Renewal represents a broader movement within Christianity that began in the 1960s. It emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and personal encounters with God. The movement transcended denominational boundaries and has influenced various Christian traditions, including Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodox Christianity.
- 40.6.** *Third Wave:* "As the millennium came to a close, rumors of a fresh renewal in the early 1990s attracted international attention with the outbreak of the so-called Toronto Blessing - a revival that developed in the Third Wave sector but soon spilled over into the Pentecostal and Charismatic streams of the Spirit movement.' With its nightly revival meetings beginning in January 1994 attracting pilgrims from around the world, the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship with its Third Wave approach to Pentecostalism became the epicenter center of fresh revival fire. Its embers torched another revival at an Assembly of God congregation in Pensacola, Florida, on Father's Day, 1995. Brownsville Assembly of God (BAOG), where revival found an inroad into the increasingly routinized and bureaucratized Pentecostal stream of the Spirit-filled movement, promised to revive traditional Pentecostalism much like the Toronto Blessing had refreshed the Third Wave".¹

41. By the year 2000 various studies suggested that

- 41.1.** the U.S. alone housed at least ten million core adherents, accompanied by ten or perhaps twenty million sympathizers

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¹ Michael Welker. *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* (p. 148). Kindle Edition.

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- 41.2. Around the globe 550 million people considered themselves Pentecostals or Charismatics.²
42. “Pentecostals emphasize
- 42.1. conversion,
 - 42.2. personal sanctification,
 - 42.3. missionary outreach, and freedom from worldly habits [...]
 - 42.4. divine healing,
 - 42.5. the Lord's imminent return,
 - 42.6. the Holy Spirit's gifts.
 - 42.7. [...] They insist that the order of salvation entails, beyond conversion and sanctification, a third definable experience called Holy Spirit baptism.
 - 42.8. [...] with the uncompromising conviction that all who truly have been baptized by the Holy Spirit [...] would speak in unknown tongues as a palpable sign of its authenticity”.
43. “The Pentecostal/ Charismatic movement has never had a single charismatic leader similar to Methodism's John Wesley, Quakerism's George Fox, Mormonism's Joseph Smith, or Christian Science's Mary Baker Eddy. Since it is a movement that has popularized and democratized charisma”.³
44. “It is a worldview that tends to be
- 44.1. "trans-rational," professing that knowledge is "not limited to realms of reason and sensory experience." [...]
 - 44.2. anti-creedal, believing that "knowing" comes from a right relationship with God rather than through reason.
 - 44.3. There is a God who can and often does defy the laws of nature with the miraculous and unexplainable.
 - 44.4. Without doubt the Bible holds an important place in their worldview, but for many it is a kind of catalyst and litmus test for the authenticity of personal and corporate experience rather than a manual of rigid doctrine and practices [...]
 - 44.5. A Pentecostal paradigm for knowledge and truth springs from an experiential knowledge of God which alters the believer's approach to reading and interpreting reality.”⁴

Some theological observations.

45. A way of seeing how the Holy Spirit works:
- 45.1. “The Spirit is thought to work immediately – both instantaneously and directly, without any obvious mediating forms – in exceptional events, rather than in the ordinary run of human affairs, upon the interior depths of individual persons, apart from the operation of their own faculties, in ways that ensure moral probity and infallible certainty of religious insight. [...]

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² Michael Welker. The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism (pp. 128-129). Kindle Edition.

³ Michael Welker. The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism (p. 152). Kindle Edition.

⁴ Michael Welker. The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism (pp. 154-155). Kindle Edition. 6

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- 45.2. This stresses immediacy, interiority, privacy, singularity, and the bypassing of the fallibility and sinful corruption of the human in both the Spirit's operations and effects".⁵

"God simply spoke to me directly, overthrowing in an instant everything that I would otherwise have believed, and therefore the unquestionable authority of what I now believe is assured" (W.C. Braithwaite 1862-1924)

- 45.3. This sentence captures nicely the religious dynamic here on the part of so-called Enthusiasts such as the early Quakers, in which a refusal to acknowledge human processes provided confidence in religious claims.

"They believed that inspiration gave infallibility, a belief that men have often held with respect to the writers of scripture, and they had to learn, with the help of some painful lessons, what we are learning today about the writers of scripture, that the inspired servant of God remains a man, liable to much of human error and weakness."⁶

46. There is a sense in which

- 46.1. Just as empirical sciences look for *certainty* in experiments

- 46.2. So charismatics look for *certainty* in some forms of experience of God.

"Appeals to the direct, immediate working of the Spirit on individual persons are from this point of view

- i. an attempt to regain an unquestionable self-evidence for the divine sanction of religious beliefs,
- ii. using the resources available for this purpose in the empirical philosophies and scientific methods of the day.
- iii. This is not mere hearsay; I am not forced to put my trust in the word of others (the writers of scripture or church teachers) about what God has done, a trust that might conceivably be misplaced.
- iv. Nor am I left to draw the conclusion of divine direction of my life from indirect evidence (say, from the holiness that the working the Spirit produces in me).
- v. Instead, God came to me directly and I had the immediate experience of God working on me to change my views and my life".

"How do you know the word to be the word? It carrieth proof and evidence in itself. It is an evidence that the fire is hot to him that feeleth it, and that the sun shineth to him that looks on it; how much more doth the word ... I am sure I felt it, it warmed my heart, and converted me. There is no other principle to prove the word, but experience from the working of it".⁷

47. The working of the Holy Spirit is supposed to make up "for their lack of authority according to commonly accepted standards on all other social, educational, moral, and religious fronts".

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⁵ Kathryn Tanner, "Working of the Spirit".

⁶ Tanner *ibid.* quoting W. C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (1923), p. 109, cited by Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 54.

⁷ Tanner, *Ibid*, quoting the Puritan theologian Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) *Works*, vol. iv, pp. 334–5, 363; vol. ii, p. 495, cited by Nuttall, *Holy Spirit*, p. 39.

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- 47.1. “In the early church, the authority of those holding institutional office might be contested by individuals claiming special gifts from the Spirit of wisdom or moral and religious virtuosity.
- 47.2. But these are qualities that, for all their personal character, are publicly evident and communally recognized.
- 47.3. Their acquisition, moreover, is generally recognized to require slow and patient processes of training – for example, ascetic disciplines. Nothing rides, in short, on their interiority or lack of mediation by ordinary human processes”.
- 47.4. The Spirit is thought to work gradually, and without final resolution, in and through the usual fully human and fully fallible, often messy and conflict-ridden public processes of give and take in ordinary life”.⁸

48. Rowan Williams:

- 48.1. Secularism and fundamentalism feed off each other:
 - i. the restriction of religious to the private sphere doesn’t necessarily guarantee a moderate and compliant religiosity – [on the contrary] it reinforces elements in religious language and practice that are themselves impatient with inaccessibility, time and growth.
 - ii. [...] Temptation to “replace secularist certainties with religiously controlled ones (19)
- 48.2. Religious language in all the historic traditions has built into it certain critical impulses. [...] This arises not from a ‘liberal’ sense that we can’t really be sure and we’d better be politely vague, but from convictions about the strangeness of the divine and the dangers of claiming divine perspectives”.⁹

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⁸ Kathryn Tanner, “Working of the Spirit”.

⁹ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*