



<u>THEOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM</u> – ThS.1A	<u>SPEAKER</u> : Fr. RANIERO CANTALAMESSA - ofmcap
<u>TITLE</u> : A CURRENT OF GRACE FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL /	
<u>LANGUAGE</u> : ENGLISH – video (En)	<u>COUNTRY</u> : ITALY

1. The contribution of the Charismatic Renewal to the renewal of theology

To understand what I am going to say about the renewal of spirituality brought about by the CR, I need to say first something about its contribution to the renewal of theology in general. In doing this I will repeat some thoughts I presented in my last Advent preaching to the papal household.

The major innovation in theology and in the life of the Church after the Council has a specific name: the Holy Spirit. The Council had certainly not ignored the Holy Spirit's action in the Church, but it had spoken of it almost always "in passing," often mentioning him but without emphasizing his central role. In one conversation during the time that we were together on the International Theological Commission, I remember Father Yves Congar using a striking image in this regard: he spoke of a Holy Spirit who is sprinkled here and there throughout the texts like sugar sprinkled on top of pastries without, however, being part of the dough.

We can say that the intuition of St. John XXIII about the Council as "a new Pentecost for the Church" found its actualization only later after the conclusion of the Council, as has so often happened in the history of the Councils. The Charismatic Renewal is the most noticeable sign of an awakening to the Holy Spirit and charisms in the Church. The Council had paved the way for this reception, speaking in *Lumen gentium* of the charismatic dimension of the Church alongside the institutional and hierarchical dimension and insisting on the importance of charisms.¹ In his homily for the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday in 2012, Benedict XVI affirmed,

Anyone who considers the history of the post-conciliar era can recognize the process of true renewal, which often took unexpected forms in living movements and made almost tangible the inexhaustible vitality of holy Church, the presence and effectiveness of the Holy Spirit.

Contemporaneously the renewed experience of the Holy Spirit stimulated theological reflection.² Soon after the Council, treatises on the Holy Spirit multiplied: among Catholics, that of Yves Congar,³ of Karl Rahner,⁴ of Heribert Mühlen,⁵ and of Hans Urs von Balthasar⁶; among Lutherans,

¹ *Lumen gentium* (*The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*), no. 12.

² See Klaus Heitmann and Heribert Mühlen, eds., *Erfahrung und Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (Munich: Kösel, 1974).

³ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. Geoffrey Chapman (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 73ff; original, 1979-1980 in French.

⁴ Karl Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church*, trans. J. G. Cumming (New York: Crossroad, 1985); original, 1977 in German.

⁵ Heribert Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person: Ich—Du—Wir* [The Holy Spirit as a Person: I-You-We] (Munich: Aschendorf, 1963).



that of Jürgen Moltmann,⁷ of Michael Welker,⁸ and many others. On the part of the magisterium there was the encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem (On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World)* by St. John Paul II. In 1982 on the occasion of Sixteenth Centenary of the First Council of Constantinople in 381, that same Supreme Pontiff sponsored the International Congress of Pneumatology at the Vatican, and its proceedings were published in two large volumes called *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*.⁹

In recent years we have witnessed a decisive step forward in this direction. Toward the end of his career Karl Barth made a provocative statement that was in part a self-criticism. He said that in the future a new theology would be developed, the “theology of the third article.”¹⁰ By “third article” he of course meant the article in the creed about the Holy Spirit. His suggestion did not fall on deaf ears. It has given rise to the present theological current that is precisely named the “Theology of the Third Article.”

I do not think that such a current intends to substitute itself for traditional theology (and it would be mistake if it did); rather it is meant to come alongside of it and reinvigorate it. It proposes to make the Holy Spirit not only the object of one treatise, pneumatology, but also the atmosphere, so to speak, in which the whole life of the Church and all theological research unfolds—for the Holy Spirit is the “light of dogmas,” as an ancient Church Father described him.

The most complete treatment of this recent theological current is a volume by scholars that appeared in English this last September called *Third Article Theology*.¹¹ In it theologians from various Christian Churches offer their contributions in view of a systematic theology that is more open to the Spirit and more responsive to current needs. As a Catholic, I too was invited to contribute to the book with an essay on “Christology and Pneumatology in the Early Centuries of the Church.”

The reasons that warrant this new theological orientation are not only dogmatic but also historical. In other words, we can understand what the “theology of the third article” is and what it aims for if we keep in mind how the actual Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol came about. That history clearly points to the usefulness of examining that symbol “in reverse” at some point, that is, starting from the end instead of from the beginning.

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Creator Spirit*, vol. 3, *Explorations in Theology*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993); original, 1967 in German.

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 180-197; original, 1991 in German.

⁸ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1994), pp. 40-44; original, 1992 in German.

⁹ *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, 2 vols. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983).

¹⁰ See Karl Barth, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher,” in *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 278, and *Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, trans. John D. Godsey (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 28.

¹¹ Myk Habets, ed., *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016).



Let me explain what I mean. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol reflects the Christian faith in its ultimate phase after all the council clarifications and definitions were completed in the 5th century. It reflects the order reached at the end of the process of formulating the dogma, but it does not, however, reflect the process itself, faith in the making. In other words, it does not correspond to the process by which the faith of the Church was actually formed historically, nor does it correspond to the process by which someone arrives at faith today, understood as a living faith in a living God.

In today's creed one begins with God the Father and Creator and moves on from him to the Son and his redemptive work, and finally to the Holy Spirit operating in the Church. In reality, the faith followed a reverse path. It was the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit that brought the Church to discover who Jesus was and what his teaching was. With Paul and above all with John we reach the point of ascending from Jesus to the Father. It is the Paraclete who, according to Jesus' promise (see Jn 16:13), leads the disciples into "all the truth" about himself and the Father.

Basil of Caesarea summarizes the development of revelation and of salvation history this way:

The way of the knowledge of God lies from One Spirit through the One Son to the One Father, and conversely the natural Goodness and the inherent Holiness and the royal Dignity extend from the Father through the Only-begotten to the Spirit.¹²

In other words, on the level of creation and being, everything comes from the Father, goes through the Son, and reaches us through the Spirit. However, in the order of redemption and conscious awareness, everything begins with the Holy Spirit, goes through the Son Jesus Christ, and returns to the Father. We could say that St. Basil is the real initiator of Third Article Theology! In the Western tradition this is expressed concisely in the final stanza of the hymn "Veni creator." Addressing the Holy Spirit, the Church prays,

*Per te sciamus da Patrem
noscamus atque Filium,
Te utriusque Spiritum
credamus omni tempore.*

Oh, may Thy grace on us bestow
the Father and the Son to know;
and Thee, through endless times confessed,
of both the eternal Spirit blest.

This does not in the least mean that the Church's creed is imperfect or that it needs to be reformulated. It cannot be other than what it is. However, what is sometimes useful is to change our approach to reading it so as to retrace the path by which it was formulated. There is the same

¹² Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, XVIII, 47, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, p. 29; see *De Spiritu Sancto*, XVIII, 47 (PG 32, 153).



contrast between the two ways of approaching the creed—as a finished product or in its process of formulation—as there is, on the one hand, between leaving St. Catherine’s Monastery early in the morning and personally climbing Mount Sinai and, on the other hand, reading the account of someone who climbed it before we did.

2. A contribution to the renewal of Western Christian spirituality

After these premises we can better understand the contribution of the CR to the renewal of Western Christian spirituality. At the conclusion of a synod of Bishops on Evangelization held in Rome in 2013, Pope Francis, issued a letter entitled “The Joy of the Gospel” (*Evangelii gaudium*). It begins with the following statement from which the title of the document is taken:

“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy”.

The joy of the Gospel is almost a tautology, that is a repetition of the same concept, because the word gospel, *euangelion*, like other Greek words beginning with the diphthong “eu” means itself something good and joyful (euphoria, eulogy, euthanasia...).

But an unavoidable question arises immediately here. If the Gospel is “good news”, “news of happiness”, why then has the world ended up associating Christian faith with everything painful? Nietzsche spoke of Christians as “preachers of death” and as “afflicted with tuberculosis of soul, no sooner born than they begin to die, following their doctrines of weariness and resignation”¹³.

Nietzsche was too prejudiced against Christianity to deserve any credit, but other authors were not. Almost all the Christian characters of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen are sad people spreading gloom around them. For Søren Kierkegaard “the awareness of sin is the ‘conditio sine qua non’ of Christianity, without which one cannot become a Christian”¹⁴. Sin and anguish are for him closely interrelated. Rarely do we see Christian people and Christian faith represented in novels and films in a positive way, spreading joy around them.

It is not just a question of a few writers and cultivated people. The perception is much more widespread. What is, in fact, the “pre-defined” image of God (in computer language, the default mode) in the human collective unconscious? To discover it, one need only ask oneself this question and to ask it also of others: “What ideas, what words, what realities arise spontaneously in you, before any reflection, when you say: “Our Father, who art in heaven ... thy will be done”?

While saying this one interiorly bows his head in resignation, as if preparing for the worst. Unconsciously, the will of God is connected with everything that is displeasing and painful, or that

¹³F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, n. 382; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I.

¹⁴ S. Kierkegaard, *Journals*, V A 10; *Philosophical Fragments*, V,2.



in one way or another, is seen as mutilating freedom and individual development. It is as if God were the enemy of all celebration, joy and pleasure. We see where the famous slogan came from, seen in the poster campaign on London buses a few years ago: “God probably doesn’t exist. So stop worrying and enjoy life”. As if faith in God were the principal obstacle to happiness and joy.

This is a distorted perception of Christian faith has deep roots which must be dealt with if we want to understand what the contribution of the CR to Christian spirituality consists in.

Already in the prophecies of the Old Testament that announced “the new and eternal covenant” we find two fundamental aspects: a negative aspect consisting in the elimination of sin and evil in general, and a positive aspect that consists in the gift of a new heart and a new spirit; in other words, in destroying the works of man and in rebuilding, or restoring in him, the work of God.

A clear text in this regard is Ezechiel 36: 25-27. It speaks of something that God wants to take out of man: iniquity and the heart of stone; and something he wants to put within man: a new heart and a new spirit. In the New Testament both these aspects are evident. From the beginning of the gospel, John the Baptist presents Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” but also as the one “who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (*John* 1: 29, 33).

In St. Paul we see these two aspects in perfect balance. In the Letter to the Romans, he first highlights what Christ came to free us from: death, sin and the law (*Romans* 5-7). Then, in chapter 8, he expounds all the splendour of what Christ has procured for us through his death and resurrection: the Holy Spirit and with him divine sonship, the love of God, and the certainty of final glorification.

As always, in moving from Scripture to the time of the Church, one notices that these two aspects are received in different ways. The East has given more emphasis to the positive aspect of salvation, that is, the deification of man and the restoration of the image of God; the West has given more emphasis to the negative aspect, to liberation from sin.

A strange paradox happened in our western theology. The one who was the cantor of grace par excellence, who better than anyone highlighted the difference between the letter and the Spirit, between law and grace, and stressed the absolute necessity of grace for salvation, has also been the one who, due to historical circumstances, contributed the most to restricting grace’s field of action.

I am speaking of course of St. Augustine. The polemic against the Pelagians drove him to highlight first and foremost the role of grace in preserving and healing from sin, the so-called prevenient, helping and healing grace. His doctrine of original sin, as a real hereditary sin that is transmitted through the sexual act of generation, caused baptism to be seen chiefly as liberation from original sin.



What made the occasional loss of balance, in Augustine's case, so decisive and so long-lasting? The answer is simple: his own unique stature and authority! When a man appeared in the West comparable to him for hardiness and originality of mind, he did not restore the balance to Augustine's thinking but exacerbated it. I am speaking of Martin Luther. He won for the whole of Christianity the merit of putting the Word of God, Scripture, back at the center and above everything else. However, his insistence on the total corruption of human nature and the radical sinfulness of man made him stress too unilaterally the negative element of Christian salvation, that is, how sinners are justified.

With him the difference compared to the East becomes truly radical. In contrast to the theory of transformation and divinization of man there is the thesis of an extrinsically imputed righteousness by God that leaves the baptized person "just and a sinner" at the same time: a sinner in himself, but justified in the eyes of God.

In this case as in many others, the golden rule in the dialogue between East and West should not be "either/or" but "both/and." If Eastern doctrine, with its very lofty idea of the grandeur and dignity of man as the image of God, has highlighted the *possibility* of the Incarnation, Western doctrine, with its insistence on sin and the misery of humanity, has highlighted the *necessity* of the Incarnation. A later disciple of Augustine, Blaise Pascal, observed,

"Knowledge of God without knowledge of our misery produces pride. The consciousness of our misery without consciousness of God produces despair. Knowledge of Jesus Christ represents the middle way, because in him we find both God and our misery."¹⁵

For St. Augustine, St. Anselm of Canterbury, and Luther, the insistence on the gravity of sin was just another way of making us realize the grandeur of the remedy procured by Christ. They accentuated "the abundance of sin" in order to exalt "the superabundance of grace" (see *Romans* 5:20). In both cases, the key to everything is the work of Jesus, seen, so to speak, by the East from the right, and by the West from the left.

The two approaches were both legitimate and necessary. In face of the explosion of "absolute evil" in World War II, someone remarked that this was what we had been brought to by discounting the bitter truth about human beings, after two centuries of naïve confidence in the unstoppable progress of man.¹⁶

Where then is the particular lacuna in our western soteriology which obscures the joyful character of the Gospel? It lies in the fact that grace, inasmuch as it is exalted, has ended up in practice being reduced only to its negative dimension as a remedy for sin, at the expense of transforming grace, consisting in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the whole Trinity in us.

¹⁵ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 527 (Brunschvicg numbering); see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), pp. 73-76.

¹⁶ Walter Lippman, qtd. in Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries*, p. 76.



Even the jubilant cry of our Catholic Easter liturgy—“O happy fault, o necessary sin of Adam, that earned us so great and so glorious a Redeemer!”— does not go beyond the negative perspective of sin and redemption. The same happens with “Amazing grace”, one of my favorite hymns, where grace is only the redeeming and healing grace, grace “that saved a wretch like me”.

No doubt, Christian salvation preached and lived in the various Christian Churches of the West is much richer and more nuanced than this, with a beautiful spirituality and at times a rich mysticism; but this is the perception of the Christian message that the secular western world has ended up with. And, as we have seen, it has rejected it.

It is precisely on this point, thanks be to God, that we have been witnessing a change which we can call momentous. All the Churches of the West and those or founded by them, have experienced for more than a century a current of grace running through them, the Pentecostal movement and the different charismatic renewals derived from it in the traditional Christian Churches.

In receiving the leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in St. Peter’s Basilica in May 1975, Pope Paul VI in his address called the renewal “a *chance* for the Church and for the world.” In what sense and under what aspects can one say that this reality is a *chance* for the Catholic Church and for the Churches born from the Reformation? I think it is fundamentally this: it allows us to restore to Christian salvation the rich and inspiring positive content consisting in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the new life in Christ.

It gives a different outward picture of Christian life: it is a joyous, contagious Christianity lived in the power and the anointing of the Spirit, with none of the gloomy pessimism that Nietzsche reproached it for. A Christian faith lived in “the law of the Spirit, which gives life in Christ Jesus” (*Romans* 8, 2). Sin is not in the least trivialized, because one of the first effects of the coming of the Paraclete in the heart of a human being is to “convince the world of sin” (*John* 16.8). I know this because it was an experience of this kind that brought about my difficult and reluctant surrender to this “current of grace” 40 years ago!

It is not a question of belonging to this “movement’—or to any movement—but of opening oneself to the action of the Holy Spirit in whatever state one finds oneself. No one has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, much less the Pentecostal and charismatic movement. The important thing is not to remain outside of the current of grace that is flowing under different forms through all of Christianity, to see it as God’s sovereign initiative and an opportunity for the whole Church.

One thing can spoil this *chance*, and it comes, unfortunately, from within itself. Scripture affirms the primacy of the sanctifying work of the Spirit over its charismatic activity. We only need to read what St. Paul says about the relationship between charisms and love:



“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but I do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 *Corinthians* 13:1-2)

It would compromise this opportunity if the emphasis on the charisms, particularly in the more spectacular of them, were eventually to prevail over the effort for an authentic life “in Christ” and “in the Spirit,” based on conformity to Christ and therefore on putting to death the works of the flesh and on seeking the fruits of the Spirit. In other words, if *spiritual renewal* became less important than *charismatic renewal*.