Fr. Cantalamessa Tells What This Baptism in the Spirit Is and How It Relates to the Sacraments.

The preacher of the Pontifical Household, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, was a keynote speaker at a conference held in Virginia. 2014 The conference was titled “Awakening the Domestic Church,” and Father Cantalamessa gave three addresses there. This one is called “The Baptism in the Spirit, A Grace for the Whole Church.”

Before speaking about the baptism, or the outpouring, in the Spirit, I think it is important to understand what the renewal in the Spirit is, where this experience happens and of which it constitutes the source and the high point. Then we will better understand that the outpouring is not an event in and of itself but rather the beginning of a journey whose aim is the profound renewal of life in the whole Church.

Renewal in the Spirit

The expression “renewal in the Spirit” has two biblical equivalents in the New Testament. To understand the soul of the charismatic movement, its profound inspiration, we must primarily search the Scripture. We need to discover the exact meaning of this phrase that is used to describe the experience of the renewal.”

The first text is in Ephesians 4:23-24: 
23 And be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and put on the new self, “ Here the word “spirit” is written with a small “s” and rightly so, because it indicates “our” spirit, the most intimate part of us (the spirit of our minds), which Scripture generally calls “the heart.” The word “spirit” here indicates that part of ourselves that needs to be renewed in order for us to resemble Christ, the new Man par excellence. Renewing ourselves “means striving to have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had (see Philippians 2:5), striving for a “new heart.” “This text clarifies the meaning and the aim of our experience: The renewal should be, above all, an interior of the heart. After the Second Vatican Council, many things were renewed in the church: liturgy, pastoral care, the Code of Canon Law and religious constitutions and attire. Despite their importance, these things are only the antecedents of true renewal. It would be tragic to stop at these things and to think that the whole task has been completed.”

What matters to God is people, not structures. It is souls that make the church beautiful, and therefore she must adorn herself with souls. God is concerned about the hearts of His people, the love of His people, and everything else is meant to function as a support to that priority.

“Our first text is not enough, however, to explain the phrase “renewal in the Spirit.” It highlights our obligation to renew ourselves (“be renewed!”) as well as what must be renewed (the heart), but it doesn’t tell us the “how” of renewal. What good is it to tell us we “must” renew ourselves if we are not also told how to renew ourselves? We need to know the true author and protagonist of the renewal.

“Our second biblical text, from Titus, addresses that precise issue. It says that God “saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).”

“Here “Spirit” has a capital “S” because it points to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. The preposition “by” points to the instrument, the agent. The name we give to our experience signifies, then, something...
In “Leviticus, we find a statement that explains all the "power" that without the Holy Spirit we can do, nothing. Through that kind of revolution, we recognize, the Copernican revolution I’m talking about. Instead, we need to revolve around the “Sun.” That’s though it were up to us to “govern” the power of God. The “power belongs to God" (Psalm 62:11). That is the power back to God” (see Psalm 68:3) because revolves around the earth and is its vassal; God is the center of this scheme, and God comes with His grace to empower and crown our efforts. The “Sun” revolves around the earth and is its vassal; God is the satellite of man.”

However, the Word of God declares, “We need to give the power back to God” (see Psalm 68:3) because the “power belongs to God” (Psalm 62:11). That is a trumpet call! For too long we have usurped God’s power, managing it as though it were ours, acting as though it was up to us to “govern” the power of God. Instead, we need to revolve around the “Sun.” That’s the Copernican revolution I’m talking about. "Through that kind of revolution, we recognize, simply, that without the Holy Spirit we can do, nothing. In "Leviticus, we find a statement that explains all the others: "I am the Lord who wants to renew you with my Spirit! Let ourselves be renewed by My Spirit!"" Baptism: An "Unreleased" Sacrament”

“Catholic theology can help understand ones sacrament received so many years ago and administered in infancy can suddenly come alive and be revived and release such energy as we see on the occasions of outpouring, we must recall some aspects of sacramental theology.”

“Catholic theology can help understand ones sacrament can be valid and legal but "unreleased." A sacrament is called "un-released" if its fruit remains bound, or unused, because of the absence of certain conditions that further its efficacy. One extreme example would be the sacrament of marriage or holy orders received while a person is in the state of mortal sin. In those cases, such sacraments may not confer any grace on a person. If, however, the obstacle of sin is removed by repentance, the sacrament is said to revive due to faithfulness irrevocably of the gift of God. God remains faithful—even when we are unfaithful, because He can not deny Himself (see 2 Timothy 2:13).”

There are other cases in which a sacrament, while not being completely ineffective, is nevertheless not entirely released: It is not free to work its effects. In the case of baptism, what is it that causes the fruit of the sacrament to be held back? when the Priest prays, "May the Holy Spirit sanctify these gifts so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ Then there is the laying on of hands when the celebrants pray over the offerings at the moment of consecration. In the rite of confirmation, as it now occurs, there are also two occasions for the laying on of hands. The first has the character of invocation. The other, which accompanies the anointing with the oil of chrism on the forehead, by which the sacrament becomes actualized, has the character of consecration. In the outpouring of the Spirit, the laying on of hands has only the character of invocation (similar to what we find in Genesis 48:14; Leviticus 9:22; Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 19:13-15). It also has a highly symbolic significance: It recalls the image of the Holy Spirit’s overshadowing (see Luke 1:35); it also recalls the Holy Spirit as He “swpt over” the face of the waters (see Genesis 1:2). In the original the word that is translated “swpt over” means “to cover with one’s wings,” or “to brood, like a hen with her chicks.”

Tertullian Clarifies the symbolism of the laying on of hands in baptism:

"The flesh is covered over by the laying on of hands so that the soul can be enlightened by the Spirit." This action is a paradox, like many things in God: The laying on of hands enlightens by covering, like the cloud that followed the chosen people in Exodus and like the one that surrounded the disciples on Mount Tabor (see Exodus 14:19-20; Matthew17:5). The other two elements are brotherly love and prayer, or “brotherly love that expresses itself in prayer.” Brotherly love is the sign and vehicle of the Holy Spirit. He, who is Love, finds a natural environment in brotherly love, His sign par excellence. (We can also say this love is like a sacramental sign, even if it is in a different sense: “a signifying cause.”) We cannot insist enough on the importance of the effects that follow....Simplicity and power are the prerogatives of God. This is the opposite of what the world does. In the world the bigger of objectives are, the more complicated are the means. When people wanted to get to the moon, the necessary apparatus was gigantic. If simplicity is the mark of divine action, we need to preserve it in our prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit. Simplicity should shine forth in prayers, in gestures, in everything. There should be nothing theatrical, no excited movements or excessive words, etc. The Bible records the glaring contrast between the actions of the priests of Baal and the prayer of Elijah during the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. The former cried out, limped around the altar and cut themselves until they bled. Elijah simply prayed, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and father Jacob, ... answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back!” (1 Kings
But the text that we need to begin with to understand something about this baptism in the Spirit is primarily John 1:32-33: And John [the Baptist] testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” What does it mean that Jesus is “the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit”? The phrase serves not only to distinguish the baptism of Jesus from that of John, who baptized only “with water,” but to distinguish the whole person and work of Christ from His Precursor’s. In other words, in all His works, Jesus is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. “To baptize” has a metaphorical significance here: It means: “to flood, to bathe completely and to submerge.” Just as water does with bodies. Jesus “baptizes in the Holy Spirit” in the same sense that he “gives the Spirit without measure” (see John 3:34), that He has “poured out” His Spirit (see Acts 2:33) on all of the redeemed humanity. The phrase refers to the event of Pentecost more than to the sacrament of baptism but in different ways.

Everything that depends on divine grace and the will of Christ in a sacrament is called “opus operaturn,” which can be translated as “the work already accomplished, the objective and certain fruit of a sacrament when it is administered validly.” On the other hand, everything that depends on the liberty and disposition of the person is called “opus operantis”; this is the work yet to be accomplished by the individual, his or her affirmation. The opus opera-tum of baptism, the part done by God and grace, is diverse and very rich: remission of sins; the gift of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity (given in seed form) and, divine sonship. All of this is mediated through the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Clement of Alexandria: Once baptized, we are enlightened; we are adopted as sons; adopted, we are made perfect; we receive immortality. The operation of baptism has several names: grace, enlightenment, perfection, bath. It can be called a “bath” because through it we are purified of our sins; “grace” because the punishments deserved for our sins are removed; “enlightenment” because through it we can contemplate the beautiful and holy light of salvation, and see into divine reality; “perfection” because nothing is lacking. Baptism is truly a rich collection of gifts that we received at the moment of our birth in God. But it is a collection that is still sealed up. We are rich because we possess these gifts (and therefore we can accomplish all the actions necessary for Christian life), but we don’t know what we possess. Paraphrasing a verse from John, we can say that we have been sons of God until now, but what we shall become has yet to be revealed (see John 3:2). This is why we can say that, for the majority of Christians, baptism is a sacrament that is still “unreleased.” So much for the opus opera-tum. What does the opus opera-optimus consist of in baptism? It consists of faith! “The one who believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). With regard to baptism, there is the element of a person’s faith. “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power, to become children of God” (John 1:12).

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We can also recall the beautiful text from the Acts of the Apostles that tells about the baptism of Queen Candace’s court official. When their journey brought Philip and the official near some water, the official said, "'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' Philip said, 'It is permitted if you believe with all your heart' " (Acts 8:36-37). (Verse 37 here, an addition from the early Christian community, testifies to the common conviction of the church at that time.)

Baptism is like a divine seal strapped on the faith of man: “When you had read the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, [you] were marked with the seal [this refers to baptism] of the promised Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 1:13). Saint Basil wrote, “Truly, faith and baptism, these two modes of salvation, are bound indissolubly one another, because if faith receives its perfection from baptism, baptism is founded on faith.” This same saint called baptism “the seal of faith.”

The individual’s part, faith, does not have the same importance and independence as God’s action because God plays a part even in someone’s act of faith: Even faith works by the grace that stirred it up. Nevertheless, the act of faith includes, as an essential element, the response—the individual’s “I believe”!—

And in that sense we call it opus-optimus, the work
of the person being baptized. Now we can under-
stand why baptism was such a powerful grace-filled
event in the early days of the church and why there
was not normally any need for a new outpouring
of the Spirit like the one they we are experiencing
today.
Lord Himself taught us, anyone who draws near to
the Lord to follow Him, that is, to hear His Words,
to believe and obey Him as one would a master
or a king or a doctor or a teacher of truth.... Now,
whoever believes in the Lord and presents himself
ready to be disciple must first set aside every sin and
everything that distracts from the obedience that is
owed to the Lord for many reasons.
The favorable circumstance that allowed baptism
to operate in such power at the beginning of the
church was this: The action of God and the action
of man came together simultaneously, with perfect
synchronism. It happened when the two poles, one
positive and one negative, touched making light
burst forth. Today this synchronism is usually not
operative. As the church adopted infant baptism,
little by little the sacrament began to lack the act
of faith that was free and personal. The faith was sup-
plied, muttered, by an intermediate party (parents
and godparents) on behalf of the child. In the past,
the renewal in the Spirit is one of those movements,
and its principal grace, without doubt, is tied to the
outpouring of the Spirit and what proceeds it. It's
effect on revivifying baptism consists in this: Finally
a person is doing his or her part, making a decision
of faith that is prepared through repentance.
This allows the work of God to "be released" in all its
power, it is as though God's outstretched hand has fi-
tered at baptism. Other occasions in-
clude the renewal of baptismal vows during Easter
vigils; spiritual exercises; the profession of vows,
the administration of the sacrament of baptism when the
possibility of not
being administered to people who will make no use
of them in their lives. Thus, they have considered the
possibility of not
administering the sacrament of baptism when the
minimum guarantees that the gift of grace would not
be valued and cultivated are absent. We cannot, in
fact, "throw our pearls before swine," as Jesus said,
baptism is a pearl because it is a fruit of the
blood of Christ. But we can say that God is con-
cerned, even more than the church, about this dys-
function. He has raised up movements here and there
in the church that are proceeding in the direction
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