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The Holy Spirit and Charisms

Sometimes people think, and this has often happened down through the centuries, that there is opposition between a hierarchical church, governed by the Pope and the Bishops, and a charismatic Church animated by special gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In reality this is not the case. The Church seen as hierarchy and the Church which is admired for its particular charisms are complementary aspects of the one Church.

In fact, Christ founded his Church on the Apostles and Prophets (cf Eph2:20) and a Church that is only hierarchical is not the one He had in mind, and the same applies to the so-called charismatic church. Hierarchy and charisms, in reality, are the work of the same Spirit, of the one Spirit, the Holy Spirit, put there so as to give life to the one Church.

When St. Paul lists the various charisms he starts saying: "And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets..." (1 Cor 12:28); which was a bit like saying to the church of the future: God has given the first place to some as Pope's and Bishops, and the second to some charismatic people.

Making a rough comparison we can say that to think of the Church without the charism of Apostles would be like imagining a tree as almost exclusively made up of leaves, flowers and fruit, without a trunk or branches. Thinking of the Church only as Apostles would be like seeing the tree as almost exclusively made up of trunk and branches.

Both the hierarchy and the prophets serve the Church, but although their service is given in different ways, they are both brought about by the Holy Spirit and are both given charisms so as to build it up.

The charisms of the hierarchy, which the Holy Spirit gives in a methodical way through apostolic succession, are given for the purpose of guiding, instructing and sanctifying the Church. The charisms of prophets are sent to renew the Church, to make it more beautiful and strengthen it as the Spouse of Christ; they are given by the Holy Spirit, who blows where he wills, when they are needed and with divine and loving imagination. In fact, the Church shines out more brightly as the Spouse of Christ because of the prophets' charisms.

Just as Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, through power of the Holy Spirit, so too the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit in his extraordinary gifts, becomes more clearly an incarnate Gospel.

While the Holy Spirit enriches the Church with "lesser" gifts (gifts of healing, service, languages...) He brings to life in all times, as in our own day, spiritual movements, orders and congregations, religious families of all kinds through [people who are] his instruments. And each of these families or orders, each movement or congregation, can be seen as nothing other than an "incarnation" so to speak, through the Holy Spirit, of a word of Jesus, or of his approach to things, something that happened during his life, or one of his sufferings...

In the Church the Franciscan orders, by their very existence, continue to preach to the world Jesus' words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven". The Dominicans, by contemplating the Logos, the Word, explain and uphold the Truth. Jesuits emphasise Gospel violence: *agere contra* (act against). Monks unite work and contemplation. The Carmelites adore God on Mount Tabor, ready to come down from the mountain to preach and face death. In the garden of the Church, in the flower-beds of St Vincent de Paul and St Camillus de Lellis, and those of many other orders, congregations, and charitable institutes, all the flowers of Christian compassion bloom and

continue the deeds of the Good Samaritan.

St Catherine and her followers announce the power of the blood of Christ; St Margaret Mary Alacoque speaks of His tender Heart, the Passionists and the Adorers of the Precious Blood never cease to reflect on the price of our redemption.

The sisters of Bethlehem, of Nazareth and Bethany... are concrete expressions of events in Jesus' life.

St Therese of Lisieux and those who follow her Little Way seem to perpetuate the word: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

The congregations that have been founded to give the Church new missionaries in every age, help to practice Jesus' command: "Go and preach to all nations".

In brief, the Church, through all these marvellous charisms, reveals itself to be a majestic Christ spread out down through the centuries.

And, through all the members of religious families, which can be found in all continents, the Church reveals itself as Christ spread out in space, across all lands.

Just as the Word of God became flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, through the power of the Holy Spirit, so too, through the work of the Holy Spirit, one of Christ's words or attitudes becomes incarnate in the soul of the founders of various religious families. The founders are like a message from God given to the world from time to time. Usually they are remedies for the ills afflicting the world, and the needs that are felt most deeply.

Our day has its movements and religious families too. They too are a word of God offered to the present age.

And since this age is afflicted by disunity between generations, ethnicities and peoples; since the divisions between the churches are felt so acutely; and since recent times have suffered the nightmare of a possible nuclear war due to distrust among nations, non-love, hatred and ongoing conflicts and tensions, one of the words that God is proclaiming today, through a number of movements, is: communion, community, unity.

In the world today it seems that the Holy Spirit, in the wake of the Council and as a consequence of it, wants to see the Church more united. It seems that it is not enough for him to see us live Christianity too much on our own; the Holy Spirit wants Christians to live more perfectly their being one, being community, being Church.

That is why ecclesial movements, in perfect and cordial unity with the hierarchy placed by Christ as a first pillar of the Church, whose modern and strong spiritualities bring together people of both sexes, all ages and all vocations, married people and single, priests and lay people, men and women religious...

This is what makes the fundamental Christian calling, the Christian's super vocation, shine out in a new way: it is love, mutual love which generates communion and brings about unity, which builds the community. In mutual love all people, created in the image of the One and Triune God, re-discover themselves, and religious families re-discover the root of their particular calling, with the opportunity to renew and relaunch it. In fact, poverty, obedience and chastity, all kinds of works of mercy, preaching, study or any type of activity, and every attitude a Christian or religious might have, while all being directed towards the good, find their complete fruitfulness only in love. It is with this content of love and with this meaning that the spiritual Movements were founded by their spiritual Fathers and Mothers.

So all of them, thanks to the Holy Spirit and his new charisms, whatever place they occupy in the Church and in the world, form only one thing, they dwell in one house, they live in one family: in the reality which is the Church, which can and must respond to the urgent and pressing needs of the contemporary world, first of all by being the Body of Christ.

Praise and thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit, therefore, for all that he has achieved in our day through these charisms, and those not mentioned explicitly here. Through them, He becomes less "the unknown God" for the people of our times.

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