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Recommended Citation

Mueller, Joseph, "A Catholic Response to “ ‘Do Not Quench the Spirit’: Charisms in the Life and Mission of the Church”" (2019). *Theology Faculty Research and Publications*. 769.

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A Catholic Response to “ ‘Do Not Quench the Spirit’: Charisms in the Life and Mission of the Church”

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We should welcome with gratitude to God this first bilateral international ecumenical dialogue statement on charisms (referred to here as DQS and by paragraph numbers). It is a theologically strong document expressed in prose accessible to a wide public. DQS therefore deserves good circulation among Catholic and pentecostal churches so that it can fulfill its expressed hope of helping its readers “to rediscover the importance of charisms in their churches as they testify to the gospel” (§ 8). My response here concentrates on some theological, especially ecclesiological, presuppositions and implications of the shared positions on charisms in this document.

DQS conceives of charisms in general as diverse expressions and manifestations of God's loving presence that equip believers to participate in his saving plan and to worship him. It thinks of charisms as essential and vital for the church's life and mission (§§ 9, 12, 66), for through them God builds up

the church (§§ 19, 21, 26, 29, 30, 36, 52, 105, 111). These two statements imply that the church is essentially, perhaps among other things, a worshipping body that participates in God's saving plan. DQS does not make this idea explicit; perhaps further dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostals can use this implication of DQS as a springboard for ecclesiological discussion.

Although charisms come on the divine initiative (13, 48–49, 65), one should ardently desire to receive them (§ 20, citing 1 Cor 12:31). One should pray for charisms, expect them, and rely on these divine gifts (§§ 29, 48, 77, 98, 105). This zeal to receive charisms and the fact that they equip one for worship and for participating in God's plan of salvation imply that this worship and participation are not merely passive but active, as does DQS's rehearsal of the great works done by Old and New Testament figures at the instigation of the Spirit (§§ 16–18, 20).

Both clergy and laity are responsible for discerning, according to the criteria of truth and love, whether what someone claims to be a charism really is one (§ 12). In view of that for which charisms equip believers, one can conclude that the truth and love in question here must be those that play an active role in God's saving plan and in worship of him. Thus, discernment of spirits will depend on familiarity with the divine plan (hence, the emphasis on orthodoxy and knowing the Scriptures in the DQS section on discernment) and with proper worship of God. Discernment will depend, too, on the notion that the charisms must be exercised in an orderly manner, which befits God's character as a God of order (§ 20, citing 1 Cor 14:33, 40; see also § 107).

If the reasoning above is correct, it follows that the church's essential worship and participation in God's plan through charisms are active, truthful, loving, and orderly. By the charisms, God through Christ and the Spirit makes people active in this truthful, loving, orderly, community-building, saving, and worshipful way. DQS's notion of charism thus implies a theology of worship, an ecclesiology, and a theological anthropology, all of them robust. Apart from a depiction of worship that emphasizes the importance of order and discernment of spirits (§ 76, commenting on 1 Cor 14), DQS leaves a theology of worship as an agenda item for the future of the dialogue.

On the other hand, the dialogue partners end their general treatment of charism with five paragraphs on the church as enlivened by the Spirit (§§ 24–28). Here DQS states that the Spirit constitutes, animates, brings forth, directs, and empowers the church, of whose mission the Spirit is the primary agent (§ 24). The Spirit unifies the diverse charisms he gives to the church, and these charisms afford those who receive them the right and duty to use them in the freedom of the Spirit (§ 26). Catholics and Pentecostals not only agree here that the Spirit works in the church, they also aver together that the Spirit at work simply is one or another dimension of the church. "The institutional dimension of the Church is the Holy Spirit working through the leadership structures established by Christ. The charismatic dimension is the Holy Spirit working among believers of every rank continually, spontaneously, and often unpredictably" (§ 27). The dialogue here identifies the working Spirit with two essential dimensions of the church, which yields a high ecclesiology, indeed.

In what I just quoted from § 27, DQS seems to reduce the church's institutions to leadership structures. However, water baptism, Eucharist, and marriage; catechetical programs; almsgiving and other financial practices; apostolates with elders, youth, families, immigrants, and other populations; social justice advocacy; Bible-reading groups; and many other structures and practices of our churches are certainly church institutions. One could not well describe them as "leadership structures," although they all do instantiate more or less directly what Christ established in the church. There seems to be no

reason to deny that the Spirit is working through all of these institutions, which have as many ups and downs as do our churches' leadership structure established by Christ. Although not established by Christ as essential to the church's life, a particular catechetical program is certainly a nonessential instantiation of the church's essential institutional dimension established by Christ, a dimension that simply is the Spirit at work. Similarly, one particular way of living out the church's Christ-founded leadership structure is a nonessential configuration of the church's essential institutional dimension. Increased breadth in the conception of the church's institutional dimension would show Catholics and Pentecostals that their communion in this ecclesial dimension is wider than they might otherwise suspect.

DQS makes the helpful point that the charismatic and institutional dimensions of the church are "co-essential ... and ... complementary" (§ 27). It notes that the church's institutions are charismatic in that they are "animated by the Spirit and must rely on the Spirit," while the charisms in the church are institutional in that they "must be discerned by the Church and rightly ordered in service to the Church" (§ 27). But how does discernment by the church lend an institutional character to charisms? DQS implies that the pastoral office in the church is an institution for discerning charisms. It notes that pentecostal pastors should lead their flocks in the discernment of God's will and take ultimate responsibility for decisions that follow from such discernment (§ 82), while it acknowledges that Catholics want their ordained ministers to have ultimate responsibility for discerning the charisms of the faithful (§ 88). DQS states in general that "pastoral oversight" of charisms involves discerning their authenticity and coordinating and guiding their exercise (§ 92, also § 94).

Still, DQS gives no explicit account of how the need for discernment makes charisms institutional. It differentiates a Catholic notion of discerning God's will, a "dynamic process" and an "ordinary corporate process" of "constant" "dialogue" with the Spirit, from a pentecostal notion of discernment of spirits, a charism exercised at "specific moments" with "an *ad hoc* kind of authority ... limited to a particular occasion or location." Pentecostals are said to engage in both types of discernment (§§ 81–82, 84). Neither type is of itself institutional. DQS's treatment of the Catholic tradition of the discernment of spirits as "a part of the spiritual heritage of the Church" misses the opportunity to highlight here the institutional character of discernment implied in § 27. Ignatius of Loyola, for example, expressed discernment of spirits in terms of rules (*Spiritual Exercises*, nos. 313–336). As a discipline into which a master initiates someone through instruction in applying such rules, the discernment of spirits evaluates charisms in an institutional way. DQS implies that the Word of God (Scripture, church teaching, and the deposit of faith) functions as a rule for discernment of authentic prophecy in this same institutional way (§ 46, see also §§ 78–79, 83, 107). DQS speaks of a "disciplined practice of discernment" helping to provide for the practice of charisms "an atmosphere of support and encouragement with accountability" (§ 77), in particular, accountability to the standard of "orthodoxy" (§§ 78–79) or the rule of faith (§ 94), notions that imply institutionalization of belief. Yes, discernment involves an operation that "transcends the rational" and involves "an intuitive dimension" (§ 97), but, as DQS elsewhere implies, it is no less institutional for all that.

Finally, how does the right ordering of charisms betoken anything particularly institutional about them, as DQS 27 implies it does? Order need not be institutional in and of itself. The right ordering of charisms is institutional, I would submit, when charisms have a right relationship to the various institutions of the church. A supposedly prophetic charism that ends up undermining the institution of eucharistic worship would hardly be rightly ordered (see 1 Cor 14:29–33a). Thus, the institutional right ordering of a charism functions as a criterion for discerning its authenticity, a criterion on which both

Catholics and Pentecostals could agree. It would fit into the list of agreed criteria for discernment at § 95 (for criteria of discernment, see also §§ 29, 47, 72, 74, 77–79, 107).

DQS is the sweet fruit of patient study, common prayer, and dialogue. Like anything sweet, it leaves its readers craving more.