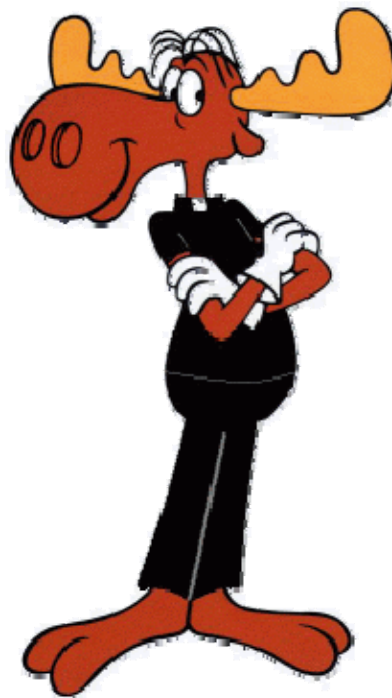


THE REV. KNOW-IT-ALL

Looks at the History of the  
Charismatic Renewal and  
Expounds thereon





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## The Rev. Know-it-all Looks at Charismatic Renewal

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*Author's note: A lot of people will find this even more tedious and pointless than many of my other efforts, and some will find it irritating. I am writing about a phenomenon that has caused much of the unprecedented growth of Christianity in our times and continues to do so. I am not writing to convince anyone to join a movement. I personally don't like movements. They involve too many meetings.*

### IN THE BEGINNING

Dear Rev. Know-it-all,

What is all this nonsense about Charismatic Renewal? Is it for real?

Sincerely,

Kerry Zmatick

Dear Kerry,

Short answer: Some of the Charismatic Renewal is for real and some of it isn't.

Long answer: What is generally called Charismatic Renewal was formerly called the Pentecostal movement. It has its most recent roots in 1900, when Rev. [Charles Fox Parham](#) rented an old mansion called Stone's Folly as a site for his Bethel Bible College. He used the run down old mansion as a gathering place for Bible studies and prayer meetings. He and his students were part of an outgrowth of Methodism the Holiness movement, which taught divine healing and sanctification, or how to arrive at a sinless life.

As the year 1900 drew to a close, Parham and his students were focused on the Bible phrase "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) For us Catholics that's a no-brainer. It's what happens before the big party after a long boring Confirmation ceremony. A bunch of Methodist Bible students had to admit that they weren't quite sure what it meant. Parham and his students decided that if the Holy Spirit descended on you, you would have to speak in tongues, because that's what happened in the Bible, and this gift of tongues would prove that you had received the Holy Spirit. On New Year's Eve 1900, Parham and his students spent the night in prayer asking to receive

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the Holy Spirit. As the clock ticked over into 1901, one of his students, Agnes Ozman, (no relation to Donny or Marie) asked Rev. Parham to pray for her with the laying on of hands that she might receive the Holy Spirit, because that's what they did in the Bible. He did and she started babbling in unintelligible phrases. And the Christianity of the 20th century changed irrevocably.

As I heard the story in my youth; the next evening, Parham's students were praying at their mission in downtown Topeka and Agnes Ozman's babbling was understood by a Bohemian who happened to be there. This was huge! Understand that classical Protestantism does not believe in modern miracles. The Protestant founders taught that "When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away." (1Cor. 13:10) They interpreted this to mean that Scripture, being perfect, ends any need for other kinds of revelation. Sure, God may heal a sick person now and then, but the age of prophecy and miracles ended when the last word of Scripture was set down on paper and the last of the disciples either keeled over or provided a snack for a lion in a Roman arena.

[Bishop Butler](#) (Church of England b. 1692) told [John Wesley](#) (Anglican founder of Methodism, a forerunner of Pentecostalism), "Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing." This was essentially the attitude of Parham's Protestant neighbors at Stone's Folly, and so the lease was not renewed. The place was sold to Harry Croft, a bootlegger, who turned it into a bar. The old mansion burned to the ground on December 6, 1901 and is today the site of Most Pure Heart of Mary Catholic Church. The wonder of it all! From birth place of Pentecostalism, to gin mill, to Catholic Church. I think this means something, but I'm not sure what.

In 1899, there were no Pentecostals. Now there are about 300 million members of Pentecostal churches and untold hundreds of millions of Charismatics, so called, in traditional churches. It is easy to make the case that the explosive growth of Christianity in the world's southern hemisphere, particularly Africa, as well as in parts of Asia is due to a Pentecostal style of worship and evangelism. The case can also be made, and I will

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make it eventually, that the resurgence of traditional Catholicism is in large part a consequence of Charismatic Renewal within the Catholic Church. What happened?

The closing of Bethel Bible College/Stone's Folly had the effect of throwing water on a grease fire. Charles Parham moved on to El Dorado Springs, Missouri, where in 1903 he set up shop again and started healing the sick at the local hot springs. Mary Arthur invited him to Galena, Kansas, after he had prayed for her healing. He went preaching in Galena, Kansas and Joplin, Missouri where 1,000 claimed to have been healed and 800 had claimed to be converted. This sort of thing tends to get noticed. Parham sent out "bands" to preach the "apostolic faith" spreading the movement in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

Parham opened a Bible school in Houston in 1906 where African-Americans were welcome including [William J. Seymour](#). Seymour left Houston to serve in a black holiness mission in Los Angeles, California. When the Baptist congregation that had hired Seymour found out that he was one of those new "Pentecostals" they rescinded their offer, so Seymour set up shop down the street in a church that had been converted into a livery stable which now got a second chance at being a church. Why not? Jesus was born in a barn.

This church/stable/church blossomed into the Azusa Street Revival, which went on for nine years, 1906 -1915. Evangelicals came from the world over to see what was happening and whole denominations, like the Church of God and the Methodist Church of Chile were pentecostal-ized. The years of the Azusa Street Revival were the catalyst that started the world wide Pentecostal/Charismatic phenomenon. The old building is no more. The site is now occupied by a parking lot to which I, being a traditional Catholic, once made a pilgrimage. Seymour and Parham soon parted company over the Azusa Street church because Parham was critical of the emotional style of worship at Azusa Street and hesitated over whites and blacks praying in the same services during the time of the Jim Crow racial laws.

In April 1914, 300 preachers and laymen from the US and a few other countries met in Hot Springs, Arkansas to figure out where God was leading. Pentecostalism, being at

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odds with Protestant orthodoxy, was rejected by most churches and Pentecostals were simply not welcome. There were objections to the claim of resurgent miracles and prophecies. The emotionalism of the participants was disapproved of and there were questions about racial familiarities in the new movement.

There were also theological questions to be answered. Could one be truly saved if one did not speak in tongues? After all, if the Bible says "...no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit", (1Cor. 12:3) and if one did not speak in tongues, could one say that he truly had the Holy Spirit, and if he wasn't sure that he had the Holy Spirit, could he be sure that he was really capable of saying that Jesus is Lord? And if one cannot say that Jesus is Lord is he truly saved? So, the big question: Can one be saved if one does not speak in tongues?

Already we see theological wackiness setting in. The movement has been plagued by theological wackiness ever since its beginning. There were other issues; such as can one lose one's salvation? Is prayer that is not emotional really prayer? (They call it agonizing in prayer.) These pressing issues caused splits among the delegates and again, as I heard the story, there were those who believed that God was calling them to form the perfect, full-Gospel, Bible-believing, New Testament Church. That faction formed the Assemblies of God. There were those who insisted that God did not want to form a new Church. They formed the Independent Assemblies of God. And the wackiness went on and on and on until today there are innumerable Pentecostal denominations in the grand tradition of Protestant Reformation Unity.

It is great fun to drive down to the west side of Frostbite falls and read the church names. I remember one that read "Fire Baptized Church of God With Signs and Wonders Following, Inc." The sign continued, "Rev. Jones, Bishop, Apostle, Prophet, Healer and Pastor." This guy didn't need a church. He was a church. Even today, the proliferation of churches goes on unabated as do the scandals from [Aimee Semple McPherson](#), in the 1920s-1940s to [Jimmy Swaggart](#), [Marvin Gorman](#) and [Jim and Tammy Bakker](#) in the 1980's.

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The snake handlers of Appalachia are among the most delightful variations of Pentecostalism. In 1910, George Hensley started snake handling in the recently pentecostal-ized Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee. He later resigned his ministry and started the first holiness movement church to require snake handling as evidence of salvation. In other words, if you've never danced around with poisonous snakes, you're clearly not going to heaven. At least that's what they think it says in the Bible.

"And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." (Mark 16:17-18)

If you're going to prove you're a believer who is saved, you are going to speak in tongues, heal the sick, right? ....Right. Well, what about drinking poison and handling snakes? Shouldn't you have to do these things to prove you are filled with the Holy Spirit, and thus saved? Oh, they drink poison, too. And they often drop dead. If they die from poison or snake bites it's obvious they didn't have enough faith and weren't saved. Don't you just love this stuff?

The Pentecostal/Charismatic phenomenon, and it most certainly is a phenomenon, not a movement, chugged merrily along blissfully creating church after church and dubious evangelist after dubious evangelist along with a few dead snake handlers for the next 60 years. How can something like this be one of the major forces in Christianity today? How can anyone think that a movement that encourages drinking poison, waltzing with rattlesnakes and babbling in Babylonian can make any sense at all? Sorry I've run out of time, and you'll just have to wait until next week.

Rev. Know-it-all

### MY INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

(Letter to Kerry Zmatick continued)

In the 1950's and 60's, after the end of the Second World War, Christians in America and Europe faced a crisis that had been brewing since the end of the First World War. Traditional Protestantism and Catholicism had a hard time making sense of the post war, cold war materialist “eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” world in which they found themselves. All of the truths that humanity had counted on seemed shaken and unsure. The materialism of both communism and capitalism gripped humanity as never before. The intellectualized religion of liberal Protestantism that also infected Catholicism in the 1950's just didn't satisfy the baby boomer post war generation in the same way that a shiny new car and a house in the suburbs did. Those were days during which man's search for meaning went only as far as his neighbor's picket fence. Needless to say, there were some who didn't find meaning in the sleek shiny world of the fabulous fifties and the groovy sixties. Among them were one dissatisfied Lutheran/Calvinist minister, one dissatisfied Anglican priest, one dissatisfied (Pentecostal) Assemblies of God minister, and one dissatisfied Anglican layman.

The Lutheran was Rev. Harald Bredesen who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit in 1946. Up to that point, if someone from a mainline protestant church claimed to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues he generally left his mainline protestant denomination. If he didn't leave, he would probably be thrown out. Bredesen saw no reason why he couldn't be a Lutheran minister and speak in tongues. As far as anybody knows, Bredesen was the first ordained clergyman from a mainline denomination to openly claim Baptism in the Holy Spirit while retaining his credentials in a mainline denomination. It was Bredesen who first used the term “Charismatic Renewal” in an article in Eternity Magazine in 1963. He objected to the term “Neo-Pentecostal” and preferred the term “Charismatic”. I am not sure what the fuss was about. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet and a platypus by any other name would seem as strange.

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Rev. Dennis Bennet, an American Episcopal Priest publicly admitted to having received the so-called Baptism in the Holy Spirit beginning Easter of 1960. His parish, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, in Van Nuys, California, dropped him like a bad habit. Newsweek and Time Magazine zeroed in on the story and once again, Pentecostalism, this time among Episcopalians was making headlines. He was hired by St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seattle, Washington, a parish on the skids, and when the parish stopped shrinking and started expanding, this too made headlines. Fr. Bennet eventually collaborated with another dissatisfied Episcopalian, John Sherrill in a book about his experiences called "Nine O'clock in the Morning."

Sherrill is known to very few people, but I suspect he has had more influence on Christianity than any one since St. Thomas Aquinas. In addition to "Nine O'clock," he wrote two very important books, "They Speak with Other Tongues" and "the Cross and the Switchblade." "Cross and the Switchblade" was written by John Sherrill and Rev. David Wilkerson about an Assemblies of God minister. Wilkerson who was tired of preaching to second and third generation Pentecostals, pastored small churches in Scottdale and Philipsburg, in rural Pennsylvania, until 1958 when the Holy Spirit moved him to preach the Gospel to New York street gangs and heroin addicts.

These books are not what most people would call great literature or profound theology. They are closer to mystery stories than theological texts. I have heard them called theological bon-bons. Still, I maintain they have changed the world. Their very simplicity explained Pentecostalism and its ability to reach the heart of a church that was dying, a casualty of the materialism and the horrors of the twentieth century. Through these two books Pentecostalism leaked into Catholicism renewing its evangelistic vitality in way that no one could have predicted. How did these books and the experience they claimed find their way into Catholic hands? Catholics weren't going to pal around with snake healers and ecstatic hillbillies. They would occasionally speak to a Presbyterian, Lutheran or Episcopalian, in the new ecumenical spirit of the post Vatican II Church. And that is precisely what happened.

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On a retreat in late February 1967 a few faculty members and students from Duquesne (Catholic) University in Pittsburgh claimed to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The three or four faculty members sponsoring the retreat had already experienced the Baptism in the Spirit in January at an interdenominational Charismatic prayer meeting, the Chapel Hill meeting, in the home of Miss Florence Dodge, a Presbyterian. In preparation for the retreat, the faculty members suggested reading *The Cross and the Switchblade*, and the *Acts of the Apostles*. On February 17, twenty or thirty students and a few faculty gathered at the Ark and The Dove Retreat Center. On Saturday, a member of the Chapel Hill Prayer Group spoke to the group about Acts, chapter 2. As a result it was suggested that the retreat close with a renewal of the sacrament of Confirmation. On Saturday night, the students began spontaneously to wander into the chapel and just started laughing, crying and praying in strange words and so began the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

People who had experienced this phenomenon at the Duquesne retreat told friends at Notre Dame and Michigan State University. Similar things happened. The phenomenon spread to Benet Lake Monastery in Antioch Illinois, and that is where I come in.

It was 1967. I was a freshman in a college seminary that was in the process of losing its identity. I was in the process of losing my identity. I, like a number of my fellow seminarians had become enchanted with Hinduism and Buddhism, because after all, in the spirit of the times weren't all religions really the same? I belonged to an ecumenical committee and was assigned to investigate this new Pentecostal movement that had started earlier that year at Notre Dame University. It sounded very ecumenical, all those Protestants and Catholics praying together. I got the number of one of the Catholics who went to the Benet Lake Prayer Meeting and to a large inter-faith prayer meeting led by a Methodist minister in a Presbyterian church in a Chicago suburb. If that wasn't ecumenical what was?

The person whose number I'd been given was a full time mother and homemaker who went on and on about what the Lord was doing in her life, in the church and in the

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world. After about an hour, being a college freshman who knew all things, I asked where she had learned all this.

She laughed and said “Oh that’s not me talking. That’s the Lord.”

I looked at the phone and rolled my eyes. Being an exceptionally lazy student, I asked her what was all this business about speaking in tongues.

She laughed again and said, “Oh speaking in tongues is easy. You could do it right now if you wanted.”

I said, “Thanks, but no thanks.”

I would call her back if I needed any more information for my committee report. When I hung up the phone it seemed like the room I was in was filled with a light that I could feel but couldn’t see. I remember smiling and singing hymns and feeling like an idiot. I went to my room and knelt down by my bedside to pray, a practice I had long ago abandoned, and only gibberish came out of my mouth. I calmed down, decided I had lost my mind and went to sleep. I was never again the same.

This was January of 1968, I think the 24<sup>th</sup>. The subsequent 45 years of my life have been indescribable. Baptism is a Greek word that simply means immersion, and that is exactly what I experienced, an Immersion in God’s Holy Spirit. The theological adventure books mostly seem written in the happily ever after style of literature. I’m not sure this is honest. True, my Immersion in the Holy Spirit has been a source of great joy, and since experiencing it, I have never doubted the nearness and reality of God, but for me, the Immersion in the Holy Spirit has also been challenging, even fearful.

There is a very strange passage in the book of Exodus. Read Exodus 4:24, 25. “At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah (Moses’ wife) took a flint knife, cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it. ‘Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,’ she said.”

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People are mystified by this passage, but since being immersed in the Holy Spirit, this passage of Scripture has never seemed odd to me. “The Lord your God who is among you is a jealous God, and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land.” (Deut. 6:115) It is a dangerous thing to play with fire, and an infinitely more dangerous thing to play with the Fire of the Holy Spirit.

These 45 years have been an unrelenting struggle with my own weakness and sinfulness as well as a struggle with those who misuse this outpouring of grace. Some of them were simply foolish. Some of them were inconsistent. I have had friends who put their hand to the plow and then looked back. (Luke 9:62) Their lives became meaningless and bitter. I have met some people who though involved in spiritual ministry have simply been evil. I have also met real prophets and amazing saints along the way. In a time when both the Church and I were forgetting the supernatural reality of the Christian life, I met people who never let me forget that to be a Christian is to live in a supernatural reality.

Next: the problems of Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal

### A SNAKE ARRIVES IN THE GARDEN

(Letter to Kerry Zmatick continued)

Last week I ended with, “In a time when both the Church and I were forgetting the supernatural reality of the Christian life, I met people who never let me forget that to be a Christian is to live in a supernatural reality.” I shall elucidate.

In the college seminary I was attending at the time we were given a steady diet of “Christ as....” Christ as Marxist liberator, Christ as mythic hero.... Christ as weaver of tales and teller of stories..... Never Christ as son of God and Savior. We had a rookie professor fresh from a liberal German University who kept telling us all we really had was an empty tomb, nothing more. He used to gather us in the chapel to teach dreary songs about the empty tomb and other Biblical quandaries. We called them the Dead Sea Shanties.

He didn’t last long, ran off with a nun, I think. We were fed a steady diet of Christ figures that included *Easy Rider*, *Billy Bud* and *Cool Hand Luke*. Nobody believed that there was anything supernatural about the Gospel. Jesus was a swell moral example and nothing more. Then I had this amazing experience and met all sorts of apparently normal people who loved Jesus, talked about Him like He was really alive and had more joy than any circus train I’ve ever ridden on. I remember going home for summer break and telling my parents that God spoke in our times, the Bible was true, God healed the sick and you could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They looked confused and said “We’ve been trying to tell you that for 18 years.” That stopped me in my tracks. I realized that all this wonderful new truth I had discovered was the same as the wonderful old truth by which my parents and most of the Catholics I knew had tried to live their lives. The speaking in tongues and being loud in church were a little odd, but the rest was what we had always believed as Catholics. There really was no reason for me to leave the Church or the seminary. In fact, now I had a real reason to be in the



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seminary, having lost my purpose a few years back. It was all good....for about six months.

I went to house prayer meetings and home Masses that went till midnight. Hundreds of us would gather in a Presbyterian church for a glorious meeting where Pastor Floyd Weaver, a Methodist minister would preach and pray for the sick and those who wanted to receive the “Baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

Then the snake arrived in the Garden. Pastor Floyd would preach about how God was forming the perfect church (us). People started getting words from the Lord that we were to leave our stuffy old denominational churches and join the perfect church that God was forming (us). At one of the beautiful home masses, an Episcopalian woman who had left her stuffy old denomination came up to me and said, “Thus says the Lord: You are not to continue studying for the Catholic priesthood, You are to leave the Catholic Church and join the perfect new church (us).”

It was a starry night and I remember going out and lying down on the ground, looking up at the stars and saying, Lord, what do you want me to do. The still small voice inside said “Hold on.” It didn’t say to what, so I decided to hold on to the Roman Catholic Church because I believed that Jesus had founded it and would not forsake it. I left the group. They called and looked for me. In fact they kind of stalked me, but I made myself scarce. Just a side note, about a year after I got out of the perfect church (us), it was announced that no one was to prophesy or speak publicly in the meeting except the twelve apostles appointed by pastor Floyd. Then a while after, no one was to speak in the meeting except Pastor Floyd. Then Pastor Floyd announced that he would make the major decisions for the congregation. This included the buying and selling of real estate the arranging of marriages and even the purchase of furniture in the homes of members. There is now no trace of the perfect church (us). I can’t even find it on the web. I guess the west suburbs of Chicago just weren’t ready for perfection. I sure wasn’t.

Meanwhile, St. Peter tells us that the dog returns to its vomit (2Peter2:22) and I returned to life at Crayola University. Let the good times roll. They say if you remember the

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sixties, you weren't there. There are very large hunks of the late sixties of which I have absolutely no memory. Enough said. I do remember a brief stint as a fashionable socialist, intrigued by the life and times of Leon Trotsky. A few things happened that separated me from my slide into the gutter. The peace committee of which I was a very active member had a big fight during peace week and split down the middle. The violently non-violent faction got into a heated argument with the non-violently non-violent faction. I decided the whole thing was nuts.

At about the same time a young woman with whom I was keeping company went home from a party with someone other than me and so I figured I should make up my mind about this priesthood thing one way or another. I went on a retreat at a Trappist Monastery and there I found a bunch of monks who led a charismatic prayer group and, having softened on the issue, I sat in. Four hours later, I was again a convinced Pentecostal or whatever we were calling ourselves at the time.

I started work at an orphanage where there two Charismatic nuns who stuck to me like white on rice. I had a car and they needed rides to prayer meetings. I would come back from the orphanage late at night and go to chapel pleading with the Lord to tell me what I was supposed to do. I kept asking "What's my ministry Lord?" A couple of friends invited me to hear a Pentecostal Gospel singer/prophetess. She was great, an African American woman who had the requisites to really belt out a tune. After the meeting when she was praying over us, and looked at me and prophesied. She said, "Honey, you are going to be a Gospel teacher. It's written all over your face."

The nuns and I had started going to a Catholic prayer meeting downtown, and when the group found out that I was in the seminary, I was immediately appointed to teach the introduction seminar explaining what all this was to visitors. I was clueless so I did some quick research, gave the seminar and thus was born the future Reverend Know-it-all.

The rest is, as they say, history. I returned to the seminary and started to actually learn things. I studied History, Latin, Greek and Hebrew and became a truly fanatical Pentecostal in a liberal Catholic institution. I was the kind of fellow who glared at you if

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you so much as mentioned beer. I would tear the cigarette from your mouth, loudly protesting that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. I made no converts and won no friends. By the time I was in the theology graduate school, there were some professors who suspected I was not ordination material. I wish I could say that it was because I was obnoxious, because I truly was and often still am.

Subsequent developments have made me think that they understood the real danger of Pentecostalism, not that it was fanatical, but that it was actually very traditional. Pentecostals worshiped the God who works wonders. They worshiped the God who gives seminars. I was hauled on the carpet for being too “proclamational” and not “incarnational” enough. That meant I talked too much about Jesus. I was distraught at the thought that I was not to be ordained. I remember how sad I was at the First Mass of a friend who had just been ordained, but a rather frightened looking woman came up to me and said, “I don’t know why I am doing this. I don’t really know anything about the Holy Spirit. I’ve just started going to the prayer meetings, but the Lord told me to come over here and tell you that you are going to be a priest. They will ordain you, but whatever is happening to you now will happen to you the rest of your life.” I was thunderstruck. A few days later I got the news that most of the seminary faculty had rallied around me and I was to be sent forward for ordination. It was a great lesson to me.

First, I learned that you can’t bludgeon someone into faith. You have to be Christ before you speak Christ. Second I realized that no matter what happened I really wanted to be a priest. No one conned me into it or lied to me about its difficulties. I have no illusions about weak and sinful men like myself who are given responsibility in the Church; and third, I have learned to worry only when someone is NOT complaining about me. I had letter-writing campaigns directed at me; I had people march in protest.

I’ve had nasty letters written anonymously and have been hauled on carpet after carpet. I’ve even been vilified in the “*Frostbaitiske Foss Daglega Bull Tímarit*” (Icelandic/ Frostbite Falls Daily News Journal). It was great. They accused me of being a Nazi. They were only the first to call me that. I know that when people are unhappy about

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what I'm saying, I'm saying something that they are hearing, unless of course I am being a jerk and they are unhappy with me for perfectly good reasons. *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."* (Matt. 5:11)

Still, every once in a while I say something that gets a rise out of people in a way that I hope pleases the Lord. The difficult times have been made much less difficult because the Holy Spirit has sent people into my life who really spoke for God. To me, that is the heart of Pentecostal spirituality. It is not so much about loud prayer meetings and catchy music. It is quite the opposite. It is about hearing God.

Next Week: "My ministry among the ex-patriot Icelandic Cod Fishing Community of the Frostbite Falls Harbor District."

OR

"I can tell when a fish is rotten."

### THE TRAIN GOES OFF THE TRACK

When I was first ordained and still knew everything, I was involved in the Frostbite Falls Evangelism and Spirit-filled Transitional Encounter in Renewal committee, or FESTER for short. It was the oversight committee for prayer groups in the diocese. It mostly argued about where to have its meetings, who got to prophesy, and whether we should have the FESTER logo on coffee cups sold at the book table at charismatic conferences.

I was eventually assigned to the parish of St. Apoplexus to serve the ex-patriot Icelandic Cod Fishing Community. It was a very poor parish in the run down harbor district of Frostbite Falls. The ex-patriot Icelandic Cod Fishing Community was very poor because they are no codfish to speak of in Lake Superior. They had been taken in by cold-hearted travel agents with tales of riches and fish. I learned their language and ate their food and did their strange folk dances that often involved pickled herrings. It was an exciting time and I was young. The parish had been dying but had been given a new lease on life through the Charismatic Renewal. A Swedish nun from the Order of Fidgettine Sisters and two Icelandic deacons started a meeting with three people. Three were soon thirty and thirty were soon three hundred. In a little while the Sunday night prayers meeting was regularly attended by a thousand people. The pastor, Fr. Eaglehaus welcomed the Icelandic Charismatics with their loud music and rambunctious children when no one else would. For this he was ostracized by the clergy of the diocese.

There was also a youth group of about 400 teens and young adults. Fr. Eaglehaus asked me to pastor it. After a few years, the movement had spread to other parishes much to the dismay of the clergy and, since Fr. Eaglehaus had died, Bishop Bergstrom made me his delegate to the growing Frostbite Falls Icelandic Cod Fishing Charismatic Community. No one could remember that, so they were simply called the "Falls Cods." Each prayer group had its group coordinator and each coordinator met in a regular assembly which also elected a steering committee which was mostly composed of deacons.

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There was one deacon in particular who ran the show, Deacon Koronatus Kreuz. Everybody just called him “Deacon Steve” and they regarded him as a saint. Deacon Steve could preach like Paul and could sing like an angel. He led his own choir called “Fylgjendur Krists”. People swooned over his Nordic good looks and angelic voice. He didn’t drink, smoke, smile or laugh. Well, that’s an exaggeration. In my many years of working with him I never saw him actually laugh, but I did see him smile twice. Thank God, only twice. It was frightening. It was a kind of a leer that one might see on a lizard before it snared a bug. He was often heard to say that Christianity was serious business, and he did mean business about which he was quite serious. He had books and records to sell.

There was another deacon, Sigmund Ortonson, who had developed a very popular television program named for a very popular Icelandic religious song “*Eg Vil Lofa*” (Let’s Worship). The show brought the Gospel into Icelandic homes every week. It was a very low budget program that was wonderful nonetheless. It was even nominated for southern North Minnesota’s highest journalistic prize, the Golden Loon. But Deacon Steve decided that a TV show, especially one that he didn’t run, was a waste of money. It would be better spent on a building and, since Deacon Steve was a saint, that’s what the committee, of which he was president, decided.

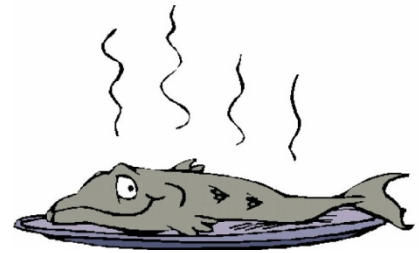
Goodbye Deacon Sigmund, goodbye “*Eg Vil Lofa*”. They began to gather money for the great “*Fellur þorsk Trúarleg Miðstöð*” (Falls Cods Charismatic Center). The money gathering continued and the building was always just beyond our reach. Someone suggested that, as the Bishop’s delegate, I should probably look at the books. After many community meetings and refusals, I was finally given access to the funds which were kept in a large safe in a garage down by the docks. In it were about \$5.35 and a lot of I.O.U.s.

The outcry was deafening... against me. How dare I accuse the saintly deacons who didn’t drink, dance or smile of wrongdoing?!? Whom, after all, did I think I was? I was most certainly not Icelandic! Needless to say Bishop Begstrom eventually came down on the committee like ugly on an ape. There were some quick trips back to Iceland by

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people from whom I have never heard again -- not so much as a postcard. I endured about three years of hearings, protests, public meetings, and elections and some real resistance from a Fidgettine nun, Sister Mary Sunnudagur Skór, Bishop Bergstrom's Personal Consultant for Icelandic Issues, also a saint. In the beginning of the brouhaha, she called me to tell me to mind my own business. After all, I was a foreigner, not Icelandic. Apparently the bonds of fellowship stop at island's shore and lutefisk is thicker than water. (Lutefisk is a traditional Scandinavian food made from codfish and lye. This is for real. The only worse smelling food is *kæstur hákarl*, Icelandic fermented shark, also a real thing. Supposedly it smells like ammonia and tastes like grim death.)



After years of sacred strife, I finally got a new committee in place which promptly voted itself a trip to the Holy Land with a side trip to the shrine of Sts. Torwald and Thangbrand in Grindavik, the balmy Icelandic Riviera. The trip was to be paid for by the Falls Cods money. I told them that the trip they had just voted themselves was a criminal misuse of charitable funds. They promptly complained to Bishop Bergstrom's new Personal Consultant for Icelandic Issues, Fr. Lamedagar. I explained to Fr. Lamedagar what lawyers and accountants had explained to me about the illegality of such a trip. Fr. Lamedagar expressed great alarm that the committee would even think of such a thing. I was completely correct in insisting that the trip be cancelled. Fr. Lamedagar then told me to write the committee a letter of apology for having insulted its members by implying that they were criminals.

He failed to tell me that he, too, was planning on going on the trip with them. I told Fr. Lamedagar that I most certainly would do as he had asked me. I wrote the letter asking their forgiveness and put it in the mail box with my letter of resignation to Fr. Lamedagar as Bishop Bergstrom's delegate to the Falls Cods. That was the last time I identified with a movement calling itself Charismatic. My spirituality is Pentecostal and I believe that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, which most people mistakenly call gifts of the Holy Spirit, are a real part of the life the Church, and more than that, they are an

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essential part of the life of the Church. Yes, you heard me -- essential, and thus should be at the disposal of the Church and subject to the discernment of competent Church guidance.

How, you may wonder, can something be both real and so disastrous at the same time? Have you not read St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians? "*Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now ending in the flesh?*" Galatians 3:3

Apparently the Galatians were. And a whole lot of us are. This sad history is couched in evasive language, but it all really happened, except for the side trip to Iceland and the herring. I watched it happen. I was part of the disaster. I encouraged the disaster. It started the moment that the spring semester ended at Notre Dame. As I was told the story, the students and faculty met somewhere not quite under Notre Dame's golden dome, to ask what now? They were used to the idea of prayer meetings. So, they started prayer meetings, and the structure of Charismatic Renewal was fixed. The prayer meeting was exciting and enriching. There were miracles. Sunday Mass was boring. So they invented the Charismatic Mass, which was a glorious combination of a prayer meeting, Mass, and clerical neglect. There were few rubrics. The normal boring Mass provided a basic structure, but along the way a Charismatic Mass would be interrupted for prophecy, glossolalia (speaking in tongues), worship and for endless verses of some very tedious songs. Such a hybrid would last for hours.

I also attended Charismatic Rosaries. Those never really caught on. There was also an attempt at a kind of monasticism called covenant communities such as True House that actually became as sinister as cults. The covenant communities were pretty much a bust, but it was the prayer meeting that became the vehicle of Charismatic Renewal, along with Charismatic conferences and the occasional Charismatic healing Mass if one could find a Charismatic priest. A Charismatic priest was a priest involved with the renewal. Those were rare, so we made do with priests who had the *sitzfleisch* and bladder capacity to say a Mass that lasted for hours while everyone put in their prophetic, ecstatic two cents.

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The prayer meeting was everything. A member of the “core group” (the very name sends a shiver up my spine) was responsible to go the weekly prayer meeting, plus the core meeting where we agonized over the interesting people who used the prayer meetings as a kind of therapy group. These core group meetings might last until midnight. One might then go to a ministry meeting, where one prayed for the sick, or rehearsed and prayed over music with the choir or “discerned” with the “word gift ministry.” Those were people who decided they were prophets and they would figure out what was a true prophecy or what was not. In addition to all this, it was expected that one would attend another prayer meeting that was just starting up and all its constituent meetings to “help them get started.” There were meetings 9 or 10 nights a week, and they were all more important than Sunday Mass. There also were a lot of neglected children and spouses and subsequent divorces.

Next Week: “How did something so wonderful become such a train wreck?” OR “How to make fermented shark’s fin.”

### CHARISMATIC AND ORTHODOX – THE STRUGGLE OF A YOUNG PRIEST

(Letter to Kerry Zmatick continued)

At this point people who have no interest in Charismatic Renewal or other strange religious phenomena will probably have lost all interest in these articles, but I still need to get it out of my system.

So what happened? How was this Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church derailed? First of all, it has not been totally derailed. The vitality of the Church in many parts of the world is the direct result of the rediscovery of Pentecost that was one of the more helpful aspects of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal.

I am told that in France there is a certain blending of Traditional Catholicism and Charismatic Renewal. Though committed Catholics are fewer in France than in times past, they are dynamic and convinced. The evidence is admittedly anecdotal, but still there is reason to believe that faith is on the rise in France. Even in the United States, the odd marriage of traditional and Charismatic Renewal has been one of the influences in the resurgence of a more traditional Catholicism, especially among young people.

The resurgence, however, has been among those who don't necessarily consider themselves part of a movement, or who may even have formally left the movement.



Mother Angelica is perhaps foremost among these. She got her start in show business through the Charismatic Renewal. I know this to be true. I was there. I was on a stage with her at a Charismatic conference in Albuquerque. She was thoroughly charismatic and her humor had us rolling in the aisles. When she established the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), she changed the face of Catholicism in this country. I have heard the vocations coming into the church these days called Mother Angelica vocations or JP2 (John Paul the Second) vocations. The World Youth Days,

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the Rallies and Conferences that are currently popular were first pioneered by Charismatic Renewal, as was the renewed interest in Bible study for non-scholars, like myself.

Among priests being ordained these days it is estimated that 44 percent have attended prayer meetings or Bible studies. A period spent in the Charismatic Renewal is not uncommon for those entering the priesthood and religious life. Again, this is anecdotal, but it seems that the thought of a calling to the Catholic priesthood or sisterhood is not at all dead, and the case can be made that Charismatic prayer groups have helped create a climate in which a religious vocation is valued, because of the belief that we live in a supernatural world. Catholicism is once again an evangelistic religion, aiming at winning converts. The post Vatican II clergy were of the opinion that it was all good -- Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, it's all good. The post-Mother Angelica crowd really seems to think there are good reasons to be Catholic Christians and these all have to do with Christ.

The movement itself, however seems in large measure to be stuck in the 1960's among its English speaking members, and to continue to develop as a parallel Church that seems more Protestant than Catholic among its Spanish-speaking members. It seems that only in Africa is Charismatic life integrated into the wider church so much so as to be unremarkable. The amazing growth of the Church in Africa seems to take evangelism and charismatic spirituality for granted.

Again, take all this with more than just a grain of salt, because I am, speaking from my own experience, and can't back these statements up with hard facts. Still, the English prayer groups I know tend to be populated by older people who reminisce about what things used to be like back when the Renewal began. It seems to me that the intensity of the early Charismatic Renewal has been transferred to another amazing phenomenon that I can't pontificate on nearly as well: Eucharistic Adoration. I theorize that the growth of Eucharistic Adoration is also a result of Charismatic Renewal, at least in part.

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The traditional belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist was certainly bolstered by Charismatic Renewal. Charismatics believe in miracles and nothing could be more miraculous than the transformation of bread and wine into flesh and blood. My progressive seminary training was full of attempts to de-mythologize and explain Transubstantiation in terms acceptable to enlightened moderns, (Transubstantiation is the belief that one substance can change into another, e.g. bread and wine can become flesh and blood. Only Traditional Christians and some physicists believe this.)

In the seminary graduate school, we had endless discussions of trans-signification, con-substantiation. A real popular one was called trans-symbolization, the idea that when Mass was over the Eucharistic species reverted to being merely bread and wine. They had only symbolized the Body and Blood of the Lord. This was not new. Before the Vatican Council, the idea of trans-symbolization was called Protestantism; however trans-symbolization looked more Catholic. It allowed for kneeling and bowing and incense and worship, if one insisted on that sort of medieval nonsense, but that sort of thing was only allowed in the context of Mass. Those who practiced Eucharistic Adoration outside of Mass were derided as “cookie-worshippers.” There was much laughter about the so-called “sacred crumb theory.” How small would a crumb have to be before it ceased to be divine?

I remember the story of a faculty argument among the progressives and the more traditional faculty members about the whole matter, until one of the priest faculty took a bread basket, placed his hands over it and said “This is my Body!” and handed it to one of the more traditional priests. The more traditional priest sat there and ate that whole basket of bread and every crumb he could detect. Tabernacles were moved to this side, that side. Broom closets were cleared out and called Sacrament chapels. I remember going into the seminary chapel and being unable to find the tabernacle. Over in the corner stood an arrangement of potted palms and other foliage. Behind the clump of greenery, you guessed it, I found the tabernacle. The Bible verse comes to mind “They

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asked (Mary Magdalene), 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' " (John 20:13)

No matter what pious nonsense priests and liturgists mouthed such as "One shouldn't have two focuses for the Eucharist". Or, "I don't want to say Mass with my back to the tabernacle," the real reason was a de-emphasis of the belief that the Lord was truly present in the form of bread and wine.

Meanwhile Charismatics were ignoring the clergy and sneaking off to convents where the Blessed Sacrament was worshiped. We would sneak out of the seminary through the woods to the Benedictine convent next door where they had Perpetual Adoration and we would sneak across the street to a prayer meeting in the Carmelite monastery. The Charismatic Renewal flourished without benefit of clergy, at least ordained Catholic clergy.

Shortly after I was ordained, no longer a student, but a member of the club, I was invited into the faculty room for a drink with a few faculty members. The conversation turned to things Charismatic, and whether or not I still participated in the prayer groups, to which the answer was and now would still be, "Of course!"

The discussion was very heady, but one of the more progressive of the group looked squarely at me and asked "Do you pray in tongues?"

I said "Yes, I do."

The conversation had ceased to be theological. It had gotten personal and one by one, the professors left the room. I don't think they were angry or even dismissive. I suspect that they simply could not fathom that someone who seemed reasonable could be involved in something so unreasonable. They were, I think, embarrassed by me and for me and did not know where to take the conversation. I was left alone, and was quite alone in my involvement for years.

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In the seventies and early eighties, there were only five or ten priests who could be called Charismatic. In the Spanish-, I mean Icelandic-, speaking community there exactly three, two of whom had nervous breakdowns, leaving just me who, being out of my mind already, had no need of a breakdown.

You may think that the refusal of the Catholic Presbyterate to shepherd the movement meant that the movement was out of control. Quite the opposite. There were all sorts of people who wanted to control the Charismatic Renewal and the leadership vacuum created by neglect became an opportunity for some very dangerous people. The best definition of a prayer meeting I have ever heard is this: "A prayer meeting is a gathering of the people of God for the free exercise of the gifts of God."

Charismatic groups as often as not were anything but free.

Next week; the Crazy leading the Blind

### OF BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, GIFTS AND CHARISMS

(Letter to Kerry Zmatick continued)

From its very beginning the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement/Renewal suffered from the coming together of two incompatible things: Catholic spirituality and Protestant theology. The experience of Pentecostals is very Catholic. Classical Protestant theology taught that the age of miracles was over. Pentecostalism is all about miracles.

I remember hearing a Pentecostal pastor who came over into Catholicism with his whole congregation. He said that Pentecostals and Catholics have a lot in common. Pentecostals love miracles and it seemed to him that Catholics actually had some real ones. Pentecostalism was rejected by mainline Protestantism precisely because it was, in their eyes, too Catholic. Miracles were for Bible times and not for the present day.

As I have already explained, when I returned home to my parents to tell them about this wonderful new thing God was doing, they pointed out that it wasn't new to them. They sure took the wind out of my adolescent sails. The supernatural intimacy that traditional Catholics take for granted is not part of mainline Protestantism. Classical Protestantism was a very dry thing until the [Pietist movement](#) rocked Germany in the 1700's. It always seems that Reformation theologians assumed that the Almighty had been on sabbatical from the death of St. John until the birth of Martin Luther, at least until Wycliffe and Huss. Luther and Calvin laid down the law, trimmed down the rituals and that should have been enough.



It was until another German named [Johann Arndt](#), (1555-1621) decided to stir things up. He was a general superintendent (sort of a Lutheran Archbishop) who read the writings of St Bernard, Johannes Tauler, Blessed Angela of Foligno and Thomas à Kempis, all pre-Lutheran Catholic mystical authors. That got him into all sorts of trouble for being too Catholic. He was criticized for religious art on church walls and exorcisms at Baptism and all that sort of Catholic mumbo jumbo. He wrote about his rediscovery of pre-reformation

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Catholic mysticism in his magnum, and I do mean magnum, opus “[Four Books of True Christianity](#)” 300 plus exciting pages. It was by no means a best seller. It was all about the mystical union between Christ and the believer. Arndt was more interested in Christ's life IN the believer than classical Protestantism which is all about Christ's death FOR the believer. Calvin and Luther, both former law students, were interested in the legal, forensic work of Christ. For them it was as cut and dry as a law court. They weren't big on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Catholicism for all its complexity has always believed that Communion, the deep, intimate union between Christ and believers is at the heart of the faith.

Arndt's book wasn't that popular. We Germans can be a bit tedious even for those who like things tedious. Another German fellow name of [Jakob Spener](#) (1635-1705) really loved “Four Books of True Christianity.” He wrote *Pia Desideria*, as a preface to Arndt's book. His preface was a mere 75 pages. It sold like hot cakes. In it, Spener emphasized personal transformation through spiritual rebirth. These were fighting words for orthodox Protestantism. If one was among the elect, what did personal piety matter? In 1695 the theological faculty of Wittenberg charged Spener with heresy, citing 264 errors. Interesting how the worm turns, Protestants charging someone with heresy? Fortunately Spener died before he could be condemned. How lucky for him.

*Pia Desideria* went through the German Empire like Imelda Marcos through a shoe store. Wherever it was read people would gather for spontaneous prayer in, heaven forefend, PRAYER MEETINGS! These were forbidden innovations. In the German Empire, there were three permitted religions. Catholicism, Evangelisch (Luther's brand of Protestantism) and Reformed Protestantism (Calvin's brand). Prayer meetings were absolutely non-Protestant, and absolutely forbidden. In fact Protestant theologians called them “Catholic Monasteries on Protestant Soil. Impossible! People were jailed for public, spontaneous, shared prayer. Thus was born Pietism and the prayer meeting. (Interesting to think there were no such things as prayer meetings before 1700. The prayer meeting was invented, not revealed.)

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In 1738, [John Wesley](#), an Anglican priest, encountered Pietism at the Aldersgate Pietist prayer meeting in London among emigrants from Bohemia, then part of the German Empire. Wesley eventually wrote,



“In the evening I went unwillingly to a society (prayer meeting) in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

This may not seem like a big deal to you, but it was a world changing event. Thus was born Methodism, founded by Wesley. Catholic piety was fused to Protestant theology by means of Methodism and the prayer meeting. It was Methodism that ended; slavery in the British Empire and ultimately in America.

Methodism was an amazing movement before it ran out of steam. Good English Protestants did not have warmings of the heart, nor for that matter, did German Lutherans and Calvinists. Italian and Spanish Catholics had warmings of the heart and all that emotional rubbish. What we today think of as Evangelical Protestantism is, in fact, a strange hybrid of Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism. About a century and half later, Pentecostalism exploded among disappointed Methodists as I have already pointed out, and the hybrid got even stranger.

When the first Catholic Pentecostals met in 1967 to ask “Well, what do we do now?” There was no one there like my wise and wonderful parents to tell them that this was really nothing new. I remember hearing about local Assembly of God Ministers from the South Bend area who invited to help guide those first prayer meetings. They meant well, but they came with the inadequate Biblical theology that has kept Protestant Pentecostalism divided for its entire history. They brought inaccurate uses of Biblical terms such as “gifts of the Holy Spirit” and “Baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

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The exact phrase “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is not found in the New Testament, the verb from baptize in the Holy Spirit occurs twice, both in reference to the same words of John the Baptist (Mt 3:11 and Lk 3:16). It occurs twice in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:4-5, and Acts 11:16). There are a lot of other references to an encounter with the Holy Spirit such “poured out upon”, “falling upon”, “coming upon”, “pour out”, “clothed with power from on high”.

Protestant Pentecostal theology makes the assumption that these are all the same thing and that they constitute a quasi-sacramental, initiation that demands evidence for veracity. It confers status as a full believer. It makes one a member of the true church, whichever true church that happens to be. There is a whole theological wing of Christianity that assumes an experience that the Bible calls the Baptism with or in the Holy Spirit. There is no such thing.

"Wait a minute? I thought you were baptized in the Holy Spirit!"

If by this you mean that night in 1964 that altered my life's course irrevocably why are you using a non-biblical phrase to describe it? Why not call it an encounter with the Holy Spirit? Or a pouring out? Or a clothing with power? The best I can make of it was that it was an encounter with the Third Person of the Trinity in which I found myself in the Holy Spirit who had been in me most of my life. It was the difference between taking a life giving drink of water and falling into a swimming pool. I felt quite literally in the Holy Spirit, the way one might be in a room. It was external, more than internal. It was not a gift made to me; it was something that made me a gift to the church, at least to the degree that a sinner like me would respond to it.

A noun is not a verb and a verb is not a noun and there is no such thing in the Bible as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Catholic Charismatic theologians have danced around for years trying to explain how the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit relate to the sacraments. We would split hairs about receiving the Holy Spirit in Baptism and then accepting the grace of Baptism in the Baptism of (or in) the Holy Spirit. Was it an experience? Was it what one should have felt at confirmation? Was it necessary to feel something? Was it necessary to speak in tongues as evidence of the Holy Spirit?

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What if you spoke in tongues at Sunday Mass and the pastor threw you out? Should there be Charismatic parishes? The questions and the arguments went on and on all because there was no one there at the beginning who was as reasonable as my parents. In the earliest days, we just accepted the protestant definitions.

Our Protestant teachers told us that speaking in tongues, prophecy healing, the gift of knowledge, and all the rest are the gifts of Holy Spirit. St. Paul says so in his letter to the Corinthians, no? **WRONG!** In the text St. Paul talks about “*charismata*” and “*phanerosis*”. He doesn’t mention gifts. The word St. Paul doesn’t use is “*dorea*”. It means “gift”.

St. Paul does mention “charisma”. It means attractiveness or charm, kindness, a favor or service bestowed. Grace is “*charis*” and charisma is the result of grace. Gift and charisma are two different things. The phrase “charismatic gifts” doesn’t appear in the text. The word gift isn’t in the text at all. The Catholic Church teaches that the *charismata* are spiritual graces and qualifications granted to every Christian to perform his task in the Church. That’s pretty much what St. Paul says, but the so called gifts of the Holy Spirit, as the Pentecostals call them, are a very specific kind of charisma, called “*phanerosis*”, or “manifestation”, a word related to the English word phenomenon. St Paul is talking about the external manifestations of the Holy Spirit, whose gifts are internal. Our misuse of the term “gifts of the Holy Spirit” ran right up against Catholic doctrine. There are seven gifts (*doreaî*) of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude (or courage), knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

Not many Assembly of God ministers nor prayer group leaders were nuancing Greek texts and Catholic theology back then. Rather than look carefully at the text of Scripture, we accepted inaccurate descriptions for what was happening among us. We failed to understand these things in their relationship to the wider Church and we were unable to integrate ourselves into the Church as a whole.

We became a strange group of fringe Catholics who had prayer meetings on a Thursday or a Monday, where we jabbered in tongues and sang rather maudlin songs. All along these prophetic manifestations should have been a blessing to the wider

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Church. We were unable to describe these things in terms comprehensible to the Church. We kept our light under a charismatic bushel; we had our own little groups often separated from the life of our parishes. They looked down on us and quite frankly we looked down on them. We were weird, they were lukewarm. Both sides were mistaken. Now the imprecise definitions are entrenched and the Renewal has failed to live up to its promise.

Next week: Gift schmitt, charism schmarism. Big deal.

### GIFT AND CHARISM – WHAT IS MINE, WHAT IS FOR THE LORD

(Letter to Kerry Zmatick continued)

Once again, I apologize to my faithful readers (a group of about eight, two of whom are canaries anxiously staring at the bottom of their cages.) You probably have no interest in all this nonsense, but I think it may be of some importance.



The Charismatic movement is bigger and more dynamic than most people think. It has lost a lot of steam here in the USA where it started, but among African, Asian, and Latin American Catholics it is huge and very influential. Years ago, in 2002 in his article [“The Next Christianity”, \(Atlantic Monthly October 2002\) Phillip Jenkins](#) claimed that the future of the world is the southern hemisphere, it is Christian and it is Charismatic. This was before the recent explosion of Christianity in China. He challenges the much touted claim that Islam is the fastest growing religion. It seems that in terms of adult conversions to the faith, Charismatic Christianity is the wave of the future. We don’t see that here because not only is the “American” church dying, America is dying. The vitality of the Church in this country is pretty much found among immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Face it. If this is true, then we Catholics had better make sure we get it right and continue to offer the unchanging truth of Catholic Faith and its two thousand years of unbroken tradition. That means that those who are Charismatic had better do their best to understand what the Holy Spirit is doing among them and to integrate what they have received into the whole Church for the well being of the whole Church. To summarize the axe that I have been grinding for the past few weeks, I will try to get it into a sentence so simple that even the two canaries above mentioned and I can understand. Here goes:

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About a hundred years after the Reformation, there was a reaction to the dryness of classical Protestantism that resulted in the Pietist movement (1725). This in turn resulted in the Methodist movement (1800) which in its turn engendered the Pentecostal movement (1900) now called the Charismatic movement. This world-wide movement is thus an odd hybrid of Catholic spirituality clothed in definitions and theology taken from Protestantism. Such phrases as “Are you saved?” and “Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit?” are understood more in terms of Reformation legalism than Biblical conversion. The terms in which these realities are described are important.

The movement is important and so the terms are important. To inaccurately define these experiences limits and even diminishes them. If for example you have a forensic - that is legal -- understanding of salvation, you will answer certain questions differently. To the question, “Are you saved?” You might answer, “Yes, I am saved and I needn’t do anything more until Jesus comes except go to the occasional prayer meeting.” If you have a Catholic, i.e. Biblical, understanding of the question, you might answer, “Yes, I am being saved, changed day by day into the image of Christ for the salvation of the world.”

If you have a forensic understanding of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit you might say “Yes, I have the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. I know because I have the gift of tongues as evidence and I have the other gifts of the Holy Spirit.” Remember, as mentioned earlier, the phrase, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” appears nowhere in the Scriptures, and speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing discernment of spirit, are never called gifts. They are charisms. So what’s the difference? You can have a gift (in Greek: “*dorea*”). You can only receive a charism (in Greek “*charisma*”).

If I give you the gift of a large picture of dogs playing poker, it is yours. You may keep it. Please do. The word charism has the sense of a favor, a blessing. It is related to the word for grace, “*charis*”. It is grace operating in you, not a trophy to be displayed on your mantle. A charism would be if I extended you the honor of representing me at the Frostbite Falls Religious Broadcast of the Week Award Banquet were I to receive the

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“Loony” (the coveted plastic trophy that depicts a loon holding a microphone). That would be a charism. Were I to say, “Keep the trophy,” that would be a gift.

They are different. A gift is mine. A charism is not mine. It is God’s favor, allowing me to be used for the preaching of His kingdom and the up building of His Church. It proves nothing about me, except that God loves me and is generous to a sinner. Gifts are to own. *Charismata* are to use. This is at the heart of the Charismatic problem. For many of us, to be Charismatic is to go to a wonderful prayer meeting where I really feel the presence of God and there is a really good music ministry and the speaker is dynamic and there is healing and people falling out in the Spirit, and then we go to Bakers Square afterwards for coffee. Hallelujah. For some people, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a kind of hobby.

To be baptized in the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. “Huh?” I can hear you say. “Now Father! You are just being irritating.” That may be true, but I have a point. Let us look at the text. The verb phrase “to baptize in the Holy Spirit” appears only twice in the new testament, both times referring to the same sermon of St. John the Baptist. (Cf. Matt 3:12 and Luke 3:17)

*“The ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not produce good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water for the sake of repentance. But He that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

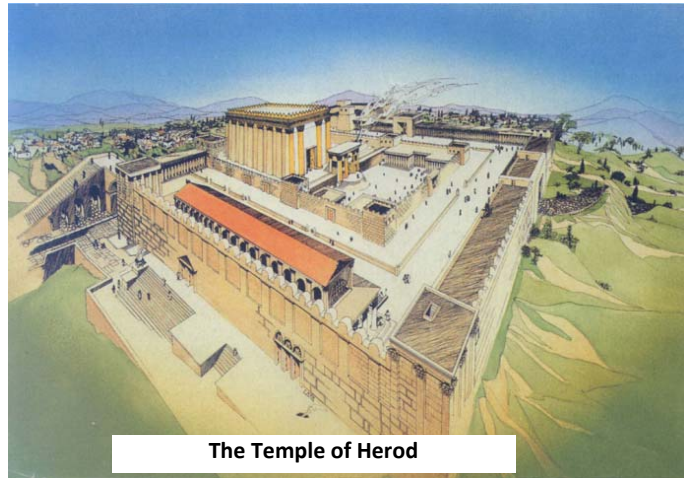
To make bread before this marvelous mechanized age, you started by cutting wheat and throwing it onto a threshing floor, which was usually a large flat stone on top of a hill. You brought up oxen, harnessed to a heavy sledge. The oxen would then tread out the grain, going in circles dragging the sledge behind them. The crushing of hooves and sledge broke open the hulls of the grain and separated the grain from the chaff. Then you would take a large flat wooden shovel and toss the crushed wheat into the air until

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the wind separated the lighter chaff from the heavier grain. Two piles would form a large one of chaff, then a small one of wheat kernels. The chaff would be burned and the wheat ground once more to make flour which was once again subjected to fire in order to make bread.

The temple was built over what had once been the threshing floor of [Araunah the Jebusite](#). The rough stone of the threshing floor was the very floor of the Holy of Holies where rested the Ark of the Covenant. The center of Israelite worship was a threshing floor like the one John spoke of. This Baptizing in the Holy Spirit



was symbolized in the very heart of the old covenant and there was to be a new temple and new threshing floor to make a new bread for sacrifice when the old covenant was at last fulfilled. Threshing involves crushing and burning and the separation of chaff from wheat by the wind. It is telling to realize that in Greek and in Hebrew “wind” is the same word as “Spirit”. Crushing, burning, separation from what is useless. Does this sound like what most people mean when they talk about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit? No, they mean a seminar after which there is usually coffee and cookies. The immersion in the Divine Presence is not an experience. It is a roaring and mighty wind that separates one from what one holds dear. It is a fire that purifies by steady and repeated burning away of whatever is useless.

That is certainly what started in my life on January 24, 1968. I cannot say that I have the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. I have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and that night so long ago was when the fire was lit, that continues to burn and crush and purify, if I let it. To be washed in the Divine Presence is a fearful thing. It is not some kind of merit badge or graduation ceremony. It is a like the wrestling match between Jacob and the angel of God. There is joy, but it is hardly an entertainment. It is fire and it is a mighty wind that will take you away from all that you thought was important to you. It is not

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given to anyone to make life better. It, like love, makes life in this world much more difficult and at the same time infinitely more purposeful. To be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to offer yourself on the altar of the new temple, and having passed through the fire in the altar of sacrifice, to enter the threshing floor, the true Holy of Holies.

Next week: so what about the gifts of the Holy Spirit that you say aren't gifts?

### OF CRAZY TONGUES AND OTHER MANIFESTATIONS

Letter to Kerry Zmatick continued. (Can't this guy ever talk about something worth talking about?)

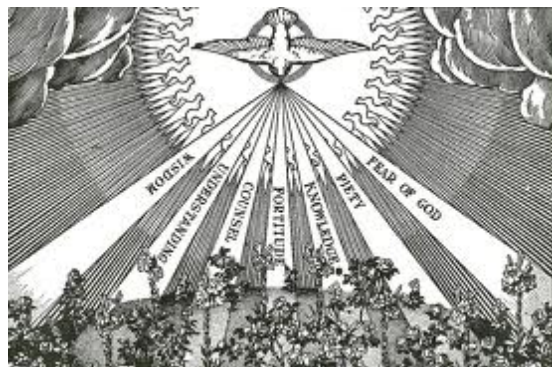
When last I wrote, I posed the question: "So what about the gifts of the Holy Spirit that you say aren't gifts?" Perhaps I am being a little picky, but strictly speaking the gifts of the Holy Spirit as spoken of by Pentecostal/Charismatics are not called gifts in the Bible.

When Peter stood up on the first Pentecost and said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." He uses the word "*dorea*" referring to the "gift" of the Holy Spirit. The word gift (*dorea*) is not used in the first letter to the Corinthians to refer to these manifestations. It is used in the second letter to the Corinthians. "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" That word for gift is *dorea* and it isn't referring to the "gifts" so called.

So these things like speaking in tongues and prophesy and healing etc. are just not gifts. That's not what the Bible says no matter how often you've heard them referred to as such. It just ain't there. Deal with it. They are a specific kind of charism, an external manifestation of the power of God.

There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord.

There are nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and, self-control.



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Then there are the charisms. The catechism mentions them in Paragraph 799:

“Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world.” The Bible word for grace is “*charis*” hence charismata are “graces” things freely bestowed. These graces or charisms exist not for the individual but for the building up of the body of Christ.

The scriptures list the following charisms in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11, 1 and Peter 4:11: Prophecy, Service, Teaching, Exhortation, Giving, Leadership, Mercy, Word of wisdom, Word of knowledge, Faith, Gifts of healings, Miracles, Discernment of spirits, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues, Apostleship, Administration, Evangelism, 18 in all. Of these, nine are specifically referred to by St. Paul as “*phaneroiseis*” “manifestations” of the Holy Spirit. These are wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues.

So what are they for? Believe me, if you’ve ever seen a true manifestation of the Holy Spirit, you don’t forget it. Take the gift of prophecy for instance. When I was a young priest I was working very hard. I was doing retreats and Masses and Sacraments and prayer meetings and.... I was so tired that I once fell asleep standing in front of a refrigerator at ten at night. I hadn’t eaten that day. I often prayed for some confirmation that I was doing God’s will. Well, I got my word from the Lord, and it wasn’t exactly a confirmation.

A woman I had never met came over to me after a fund-raising dinner for a drug treatment center and said, “Fr. Rich, you don’t know me, but I have been praying for you. The Lord gave me a vision about you. I saw you dressed in all sorts of sporting gear, footballs helmet, goggles, track shoes, knee pads and more. The Lord wants to tell you that you aren’t really serving Him. You are playing at this like it was game.”

You could have knocked me over. I had been asking the Lord for a word and this fearless woman was faithful to her calling and let me have it with both barrels, though

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she didn't know me, or my situation. She was actually hesitant to confront a stranger with a hard word from God. She was faithful to the Lord and it changed my life.

Another dear friend, afflicted with seizures was carried into a prayer meeting and left the meeting running and jumping. She has never had a seizure since, nor has she taken her debilitating anti-seizure drugs since. I have seen people leap out of wheel chairs and even saw a man spring back to life after the paramedics had given him up for dead. You notice these things. They are manifestations of the power and presence of God, a power that can change the life which will let itself be changed.

What about speaking in tongues, isn't that a bit ridiculous? Yes, it's quite ridiculous and it's supposed to be. Most people think that the charism of tongues was a gift by which the Apostles could preach in languages they had not learned. This is just not so. In the plaza on the first Pentecost in Jerusalem, the crowd that gathered all spoke Greek and Aramaic many also spoke Latin and certainly Hebrew. There was no need for a gift of tongues. Everybody there shared a number of languages. The disciples went out onto that balcony and were accused not of being eloquent, but drunk!! (Acts 2:13) St. Paul says, "But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue." (1Cor. 14:19) Whatever glossolalia (the fancy word for "speaking in tongues" which I will now use in order not to sound like a total idiot) was, it was unintelligible just like a good old meetin' in a store front church in a rundown part of town. So what is the good of speaking in tongues? Look at what St. Paul says about the manifestations of prophesy and tongues.

"Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" (1Cor. 14:22-25)

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Let me get this straight. Tongues is a sign for unbelievers because they'll think you're crazy. Prophecy is a sign for believers, because unbelievers will have the secrets of their hearts revealed and say that God is among you. I hear you saying "That's crazy. It makes no sense!! You must have it backward."

I remember a young man who was contemplating suicide. His mother begged him to come to a charismatic retreat. He went. The congregation was all shouting in unintelligible sounds at the top of their voices. They were clearly all crazy and they were clearly all happy. He thought, "Why not?" and joined in the lunacy. He is alive to this day. No one leaves a good prayer meeting and says, "Very nice service, Reverend" after people have been shouting in Babylonian and swinging from the chandeliers. No, they usually say "You're all crazy and should probably be arrested and I'm coming back next week to figure out just how crazy you are." If it's a real "penny-costal prayer meeting" no one sleeps through the service. Unfortunately there are a lot of so-called prayer meetings through which I have slept quite soundly. Still when you go to a prayer meeting that the Holy Spirit also attends, you know that something powerful is going on. Prophetic utterance can be a bit overwhelming. When the secrets of your hearts are laid bare, you might just not come back. So crazy tongues is a sign for unbelievers. Insightful prophecy should be reserved for believers who can take it. These manifestations have nothing to do with the personal holiness of the people who exercise them. They are pure unmerited grace. Herein lies one of the great Pentecostal problems and it is a problem that Catholics jump into with both feet.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that the (real) gifts of the Holy Spirit exist to sanctify us by giving us the opportunity to grow in virtue. Wisdom engenders charity. Understanding engenders faith etc. You can look this up in the Catechism, in paragraph 1831. The fruits of the Holy Spirit; Love, Peace, Patience, Joy, etc. are the very character of Christ which is what the Heavenly Father is trying to work in us that we might be the image of Christ in the world and the adopted children of God.

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit exists only for the purpose of evangelism. The best

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definition of Charismatic Renewal I ever hear came from Mr. Bill Beaty who was the President of the National Service Committee of the Charismatic Renewal. He said that the Charismatic Renewal is an evangelistic movement that brings people to a saving knowledge of Christ through signs and wonders.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a vocation to be an evangelist, and these manifestations exist for the good of the Church and the world. They are not an experience that validates me or heals me or makes me feel better or distinguishes me for my holiness. There is no me in them if they are used properly. The problem above mentioned is that we think that somehow these things are signs of the holiness of the agent. I have met some pretty disreputable people at whose hands great things have been done. I remember when a great faith healer was caught in scandal, someone who had been dramatically healed by that man's ministry asked me, "Will my sickness come back now?"

We Catholics have always known that a bad priest can say a good Mass, because it not the priest who says Mass, but it is Christ. So to it not the faith healer who heals or the prophet who speaks, it is Christ. Remember that Caiaphas the high priest, a charlatan if ever there was one, prophesied accurately when he said, "You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50)

Jesus says very clearly that you are to judge a man and a ministry not by miracles, but by fruits, which are as I have pointed out are Love, Peace etc. as found in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. When a miracle happens, Catholics flock there by busload. Pentecostal Protestants do the same thing. I remember a bright neon sign on a Pentecostal church that read "Why should you suffer when others are being healed?" The manifestations don't exist for my convenience and comfort. They exist that the world might know that the Kingdom of God has come about in power and that Jesus Christ is Lord.

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Catholics and Protestants alike misunderstand the role of the miraculous and the narcissism with which people have received these powerful charisms has been a great hindrance to the unfolding of the Pentecost for which good Pope John prayed. “By a kind of new Pentecost renew Your marvelous works in this our time... enlarge the kingdom of the Divine Savior, a kingdom of truth and justice, of love and peace.”

Pope John asked, God gave, and we who were called frittered away the blessing.

Next week: If you think I’m done you’re not even close.

## STRUCTURED SPONTANEITY AND FREE FORM MASS

Letter to Kerry Zmatick, relentlessly continued.....

Let us move on, like a herd of turtles, to the essential expression of the Charismatic/Pentecostal movement: the prayer meeting. That the prayer meeting is a fairly recent historical invention may have surprised some of you, my faithful readers, who at this point are probably down to two or three. I have it on good



authority that the two canaries who used to follow the column, have given up reading my articles that line the bottom of their cage and are using them in a more appropriate way. Again, I digress. The prayer meeting!



Perhaps you recall that the prayer meeting as a regular thing did not really exist until after 1675. It was a reaction to the publication by [Philip Jakob Spener](#) of the pamphlet, “*Pia Desideria*” roughly translated, “Pious Desires”. This 200 page “pamphlet” was published as an introduction to the vastly larger and more turgid masterpiece, “Four Books of True Christianity”, by [Johann Arndt](#). Arndt’s book reached back into pre-Lutheran, medieval Catholic mysticism and was thus suspect. Both Arndt and Spener were called heretical by Protestants. (That’s a hoot, the pot calling the kettle heterodox.) In 1590, Arndt was deposed from his pastorate

by Calvinists for refusing to remove pictures from his church and using exorcism in the administration of baptism. Similarly in 1695 the theological faculty of Wittenberg charged Spener with 264 errors. The [pietism](#) Arndt and Spener initiated was too emotional and too Catholic. Protestantism was rational and forensic (a polite word for legalistic).

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Spener made Arndt's ideas available to a wider audience. His pamphlet sold like "*heisse Kuchen*." (That's "hot cakes" for all you who don't keep up with German theological terms.) Wherever it was read, people formed prayer groups that would meet in public places and pray spontaneously. The horror of it! There were three legal religions in the German Empire: Catholicism, Lutheranism and Reformed Protestantism (Calvinism) this wasn't any of those. Protestants decried the prayer meetings as "Catholic monasteries on Protestant soil!!!" Pietists would routinely be arrested for public, spontaneous prayer. A Catholic was supposed to go into a church, kneel in back and mind his own business as good Catholics do to this day. Protestants were expected to go into unadorned meeting halls, sit on hard benches, listen to very long, heady sermons and then to go home and do something useful like make money. These Pietists getting all emotional about religion in public were just beyond the pale.

Certainly, you must be thinking, there were prayer meetings before 1675. Not really. St. Francis and his followers were known to break out in spontaneous prayer as they traveled the roads of Europe. They loved the Lord so much they just couldn't help themselves. Certainly people have always prayed spontaneously. But a prayer meeting as a regular structure? Can't find it before 1675. Surely the first Christians prayed spontaneously! You are forgetting that the first Christians were Israelites mostly from the tribes of Judah and Levi. Do you know any modern Jews? They are nothing if not liturgical.

We Catholics and our Jewish friends get our sense of liturgy and the idea of the liturgical calendar from the temple liturgies of the time of Christ. If you go to an orthodox Jewish synagogue, there is nothing spontaneous going on. Passionate yes, spontaneous no. There are certain prayers that one says on certain days of the week, month and year. The Roman Catholic missal is nothing compared to the synagogue prayer book. The flipping of pages, rolling of scrolls and bowing up and down make the Catholic Mass look simple.

In short, the first Christians being orthodox Israelites didn't have prayer meetings. They had liturgy. I'm sure they were passionate, and they often prayed spontaneously. We

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see it in the Acts of the Apostles, but in their coming together they were liturgical. I doubt that any of the first disciples ever said, “Hey, I’ve got an idea! Let’s just make this up as we go along!” They had a hymnal, the book of Psalms, and the melodies that went with it, some of which we still sing today in the Catholic Mass as psalm tones. They had liturgy that involved bread, wine, oil, and possibly even incense and holy water, the whole panoply of sacrifice. Their direct heirs, the Catholic and Orthodox wings of Christianity still have these sacrificial accouterments. But prayer meetings? The prayer meeting is a modern thing, modern at least by Catholic standards.

I remember those who participated in the events telling the stories of the first days of Catholic Pentecostalism (Charismatic Renewal, most people now call it). This great outpouring of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit happened in 1967 during the second semester at Notre Dame and Duquesne universities. These people were students. They only stopped to figure things out after final exams were done in spring. As I heard the story that they met not quite under Notre Dame’s golden dome to figure out “What next?” Suggestions were made: retreats, days of renewal and, of course, prayer meetings. After all, the first stirrings of the New Catholic Pentecost at Duquesne University had been a result of a few students and faculty attending the Chapel Hill prayer meeting in the home of Miss Flo Dodge, a Presbyterian. The prayer meeting had entered American Protestantism through the Methodist movement, which was the English version of Pietism. By 1967 the prayer meeting was a standard part of Protestant life. When enlivened by Pentecostalism, the prayer meeting was actually worth going to. People were passionate about faith and expected God to actually do something! The students went home for the summer where they started prayer meetings.

Imbued with the Spirit of Vatican II, throngs of priests and nuns who wanted to take summer courses came to Notre Dame and Duquesne where they were introduced to the prayer meeting. The whole thing was like throwing water on a grease fire. In the Winter of ‘67, that’s where I come in. I started investigating the whole deal, and was “baptized in the Holy Spirit” following a phone conversation in January of ‘68. I cherish the experience to this day, and still think of myself as a Pentecostal Catholic. I was

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invited to attend a prayer meeting conducted by a Methodist minister in a Presbyterian church. The Methodist minister eventually edged out the Presbyterian congregation, bought the church building and started a cult in which he made all decisions for the faithful down to who they would marry and what kind of kitchen table they should buy. I was long gone by that time, thank Heaven.

You have perhaps heard the line about “assume.” To assume makes a mindless beast of burden out of you and me. When we assume that the prayer meeting is a given, a structure that just is, we are making a very foolish assumption. The great weakness of Catholic Charismatic Renewal lies in this assumption. The Protestant error rests on the assumption that the first Christians were simpler, non-liturgical people. This just isn’t true. Things don’t always get complicated, they often start out complex and then simplify. The Protestant error is to try to recapitulate an early Christian simplicity that never existed. In trying to simplify the Church, they conformed it to their own expectations. The liturgy of Protestantism would be absolutely foreign to the first disciples. The liturgical movement of the 60’s and 70’s made the same mistake.

The Charismatic Renewal drank the liturgical Kool-aid of the era and somehow assumed that the prayer meeting with a brief Mass tacked on to the end was closer to the early Christian experience than those boring dry Masses they had to endure on Sunday at St. Apathia’s church, or wherever they happened to be members. They looked forward to the prayer meeting, which, if they could find a priest who was “spirit-filled” became a CHARISMATIC MASS, infinitely better than a dry boring regular Mass. The prayer meeting became the norm. Mass was an invalid who needed to be revived by dancing about and babbling in Babylonian. Since the prayer meeting became the new liturgical expression, the prayer meeting took on structure and became, you guessed it, boring, but with tambourines. Sunday obligation became a thing of the past, because, unless it was Charismatic, some people didn’t “get anything” out of it.

The prayer meeting, on the other hand became an obligation. If one said “You know, I’m not going to prayer meeting this Thursday. I’m going to stay home and watch television.” It was sure sign that you were, heaven forefend, backsliding and prayers

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were said for your repentance. To say “I don’t get anything out of Mass,” excused one from Sunday obligation. To say “I don’t get anything out of the prayer meeting,” meant that you were obviously in sin and probably running around with a disreputable crowd. The whole thing eventually became absurd. Sunday was not obligatory. Thursday night prayer meeting was.



It got even sillier. As the prayer meeting took the place of Sunday Mass, it became structured, even quasi-liturgical. The structure was as follows. A half hour of spontaneous warm up that involved lively music and prayer “in the spirit.” If the throng was not excited enough, the prayer group “leader” usually at a microphone, would say something like, “Let’s stand up and really let the spirit just flow. Or, “We are just going to praise the Lord.” Or, “We are just going to really seek the Lord.” The leader might start shouting over the microphone in an attempt to get people excited. The leader might start speaking in tongues with the volume turned up. I often wondered exactly to whom were these utterances were addressed. The whole nonsense gave rise to the saying, “Charismatics are people who believe God is deaf.”

“Just” was a very important word. I’m not quite sure what it meant in the context, but it was pivotal. I think it implied that anything the prayer group leader was saying was “just” not important, or perhaps, “Let’s focus here group. We’re not as excited as we should be!” After the “spontaneous” half hour was over there would be testimonies, “I used to be messed up on drugs, but now I’m messed up on religion, hallelujah!” Then there would be a teaching, usually about a half an hour, given by someone who was as clueless as most of the participants, but his clueless-ness was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes rather than a clueless Catholic, a Protestant minister would come and explain the gifts of the Holy Ghost and lead everyone in prayer for the “release of the gifts.” In effect, you weren’t getting out of there until you could speak in tongues, no matter how late it got. Then there would be a time of quiet, or waiting on the Lord, during which people would prophesy. “Thus says the Lord, My children I am coming

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very soon.” Or, “Thus says the Lord, My children, I love you very much.” I believe in the prophetic gift, about which I will speak later, but prophesy, so called, really took a nose dive in 1982 after Assembly of God minister, Rev. Jimmy Swaggart said that if you stayed Catholic you were probably going to hell.

We suddenly got very Catholic. If they were going to beat us with their Bibles, we would strangle them with our Rosaries. In order to make sure that prophecies were Catholic; they really should be written down, checked for doctrinal error and delivered only by approved prophets. A good prophesy makes the hair on your arm stand up and makes you want to run out of the room because it cuts to the heart. It's usually one sentence long and gets to the point immediately. A good prophesy is embarrassing. It's supposed to be. These written prophecies that became popular were merely tedious. They went on and on and on and drifted into that foggy realm called “locutions.” I won't discuss locutions here. I have enough enemies.

After the prophecies, came healing, perhaps prefaced by testimonies. I remember one deacon saying, as he looked at his watch, “The time of healing has now arrived.” What he meant was, “I'm tired and have to get up fairly early in the morning. So let's wrap this up.” And then announcements and a final rousing song. “Go in peace the prayer meeting is ended.”

So we came to an absurd position. We had structured prayer meetings and spontaneous Masses. It never occurred to us that a Mass and a prayer meeting are completely different things. Again, we were through the looking glass!

Next week: Despite all I've said, I actually like a good prayer meeting and wish I knew where there was one.

### WHAT SHOULD A GOOD PRAYER MEETING BE?

(Letter to Kerry Zmatick continued)

Let me begin by saying that this current extended tirade may be nothing more than a confession of my own sins. I am a very bad Charismatic and the true

Charismatics whom I am insulting are guilty of none of these things. If you are offended by my remarks, please understand that they couldn't possibly refer to you. Keep that in mind as I continue to rant.

In my last installment, I tore up prayer meetings pretty thoroughly and then said that I really like a good prayer meeting. Allow me to explain. Most prayer meetings, so called, aren't prayer meetings at all. There isn't a lot of prayer that actually goes on. At a mediocre prayer meeting, there is music, the purpose of which is to get people in "the mood." There are testimonials that are also helpful, to get people in the mood. There is a lengthy teaching, which as often as not is supposed to inspire people about how to get into the mood. Then there is the mood, and everyone leaves happy. Remember, elsewhere I have told you that Martin Luther redirected the sacrifice of the Mass when he said that the Mass was not a sacrifice, but that it existed for the consolation and instruction of the people. Luther took the focus off of God and made the congregation the object of the service. The service was no longer directed at heaven. It became earthbound. The earthbound liturgy of the reformation ultimately has no means of gauging its success other than the way that it makes people feel. This error has made its way into every kind of Protestantism including Protestant Pentecostalism and now makes its way, like an infection, into Catholicism by means of an inauthentic ecumenism. ("There really is no difference between us." "We worship the same God." "In our hearts we're undivided," that sort of nonsense.)

"So what should a good prayer meeting be?" I thought you'd never ask! The best definition I've ever heard is that "a prayer meeting is a gathering of the people of God for the free exercise of the gifts of God." Now that I have thoroughly demolished the idea that the charismatic manifestations are "gifts", we'll let it slide this time. Add to this

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the classic definition of prayer as “a lifting of the heart and mind to God” and you’ve pretty much nailed it. What passes for a prayer meeting is really the liturgy of a kind of parallel charismatic church. But a prayer meeting is simply a meeting where people pray spontaneously.

The best prayer meetings I’ve ever attended were completely unscripted. The old Pentecostals had something called the “tarry service.” An old translation of the Bible put it this way: “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” Luke 24:49. The disciples were told to “tarry” that is to wait in Jerusalem for empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

The old time Pentecostals would spend a night in prayer and intercession on Saturday night preparing for Sunday services. They would just pray and wait until the Holy Spirit showed up. Remember that the beginnings of

Pentecost in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century reach back to the Azusa Street Revival where Rev. Seymour would come into the building sometime in the early evening and Frank Bartelman, an early chronicler of the Pentecostal Movement, recounts the congregation sat on wooden planks for pews and that “Brother Seymour generally sat behind two empty shoe boxes (packing crates), one on top of



The Azusa Street Meeting House

the other. He usually kept his head inside the top one during the meeting, in prayer. There was no pride there.... In that old building, with its low rafters and bare floors...” The ceiling was too low for a raised platform for “the leadership” or for a formal pulpit. Brother Seymour would pray, face hidden away in a packing crate and the place would fill with a Holy Presence that changed lives and eventually changed the direction of Christianity, Protestant and Catholic alike. There were no microphones, no order of service, no music ministry. There was just utter, prayerful simplicity. The congregants would sing and pray and prophesy. The sick would be healed and the Gospel made visible, all without anyone looking at a watch or a printed sheet of instructions.

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The old Catholic Puerto Rican Charismatics (Oops! I mean Icelandic Charismatics) would do the same thing. They would lock themselves in church at night with their Bibles, their blankets, pillows and a coffee pot, and of course a few tambourines and they would seek God. They called it a “*Vigilia*”. They would stay there until they were done and they weren’t done until they knew that God had answered. How did they know that God had answered? They simply knew that they knew that they knew. These gatherings were amazing; the intensity, the joy and the sense of the nearness of Heaven. They were wonderful meetings because people really wanted God. When my time as the Bishop’s liaison to Spanish (Oops again) speaking prayer groups was over, they still had the *Vigilias*, but they ended promptly at 10 and were conducted by the “leadership.” There was a choir and a sermon and God was expected to sit quietly in the back of the church and let the leaders do the talking.

Those old tarry services and *vigilias* were like torrents in the desert, the thirsty soul revived and encouraged. These were very poor people. Their lives knew real sorrow, but they were capable of so much joy when they knew that they had encountered the Almighty. It was as if they had spent a few moments in Heaven, and I believe they really did. One of the most interesting things about those meetings was the profound silence that often fell on the group.

These days, a Charismatic meeting is gauged as successful only when there has been measurable auditory damage. This is achieved by the use of electrified instruments and microphones. But I remember meetings during which a hush as thick as fog would fall over the crowd and one was almost afraid to look up. It was a kind of stillness that vibrated and glowed. In the midst of that tangible silence it seemed that someone had entered the room. It was like the beating of the wings of some great dove. You felt that if you lifted up your hands and stretched as far as you could, you could touch the silence. It was a silence that radiated strength and power from on high. Then the rejoicing would begin. There was shouting and weeping that was not forced or manipulated. God was in the silence. We human beings made the noise with our whole hearts and minds and souls and with all our strength. The excitement wasn’t divine, it was humanity meeting divinity and one understood what St. Irenaeus meant when he said, “The glory of God is

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man fully alive, and the life of man is the vision of God.” We used to sing an old chorus: *“No puede estar triste el corazon que ama a Cristo, no puede estar triste el corazon que conoce a Dios. Por eso le canto...”* “The heart that loves Christ cannot be sad, nor can the heart be sad that knows God. That is why I sing to Him...”

I am almost in tears to remember the joy of those meetings, and almost in tears to think of what has become of such a great favor bestowed by Heaven on the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until now the worst and most fratricidal of centuries. God poured out a healing balm in the renewal of Pentecost and the in the Vatican Council, but the balm was stolen and replaced with a spirit of division and dominance. The scriptures say that “the gifts (charismata) and calling of God are irrevocable.” (Rom. 12:6) I hope with all my heart that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit called for by good Pope John in preparation for the Vatican Council can be rediscovered under the pile of nonsense by which it has been buried.

You may have guessed, I have some suggestions about prayer meetings and the nature of Charismatic manifestations. Thank you for letting an old man reminisce.

Next week: A few casual suggestions.

### CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

Letter to Kerry Zmatick

Still.

Friends, I am sorry that this is so long and frankly, so uninteresting, but I think that the importance of Charismatic Renewal, for good and for ill, is little understood. The effects are everywhere.

- The revolution in Catholic media is a very direct outgrowth of Charismatic Renewal.
- Mother Angelica? A contemplative nun who was dragged out of her convent by Charismatic Renewal, who later parted company with the “movement” because of what she perceived as its excesses. She revolutionized Catholic radio and television;
- World Youth Day with its dancing bishops? I have no doubt that it is an outgrowth of the Charismatic movement’s conferences and youth rallies.
- That irritating fellow next to you in church who, at the Our Father, insists on holding hands with you, though you haven’t even been properly introduced and then thrusts up his hands and yours in a kind of victory wave at “for thine is the kingdom....”? Charismatic Renewal again.

Whether you like it or don’t, the Charismatic Renewal is a fact — a huge fact. The other day, I was apologizing to a faithful reader for this endless tirade. He said, “Well it’s true, a lot of people don’t understand the Charismatic Renewal.” That is not why I am writing all this. The big problem is that Charismatics don’t understand the Charismatic Renewal. I will continue by quoting the Scriptures.

*Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the LORD is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1Kings 11:19 and following)*

In my last disquisition, it might have surprised you to hear that stillness is at the heart of true Pentecostalism, and not noise. Certainly things can get noisy, but that is the very

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human response to the perceived presence of the Lord.

I was bemoaning these things with another old Pentecostal friend and he reminded me of an experience that we both have had. Sometimes, in a small quiet prayer meeting as I would sit or kneel waiting on the Lord, it would seem that suddenly I was in a very large space, a space that seemed infinite. It would seem so large that I would almost feel dizzy. It was as if the presence in the room was too large for such a small space, and I was transported to another dimension. Pentecost is about expectant waiting, not emotional manipulation. The quiet meetings often produce the most profound experiences.

### **PAY ATTENTION! I AM FINALLY GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER!!**

The great enemy of Pentecostal spirituality is the microphone. The microphone is, I believe a great danger to Christianity in general. Admittedly I blather at people via microphone just about every day, but that's because I am talking to people.

When I first said the old Latin Mass, I was amazed that I didn't use a microphone except for the sermon. Then it occurred to me. Why should I use a microphone? I was talking to God whose hearing is excellent.

"But" you might say, "I can't hear the priest unless he speaks into a microphone."

Has it ever occurred to you that it does not matter that you can't hear or see what's going on? The Mass is not about you.

"But I am not getting anything out of it when I can't hear it. I can't participate."

Remember that if you are Catholic, Mass is a sacrifice in which you come to offer your "prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day," to God. You may or may not get something out of it, but that is not why you come.

A Catholic goes to Mass to give, not to get. To say that you don't get anything out of the sacrifice of the Mass is a bit like a lamb on an altar asking, "What's in this for me?" or

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like Christ on His Cross saying, “You know, I’m not really getting much out this.”

To think that you have to get something out of the Mass or that in order for it to be real it must be heard by you, means that you have succumbed to the narcissism of the Protestant Reformation. As I have told you a number of times, Luther put an end to worship when he declared that the Mass was not a sacrifice, but that it existed for the consolation and instruction of the people. What passed for worship was, in Luther’s theory, not directed at God, but at us.

How, then, can I be consoled and instructed by something I cannot hear or see? My answer would be another question, “So, you are here to be consoled and instructed? Then certainly we will need a microphone because the service is all about you, isn’t it?”

The sacred microphone is the necessary sacramental for the worship of an audience. The Holy Microphone, not Pentecostalism is the opposite of Catholic worship and the Holy Microphone has done much damage to true Pentecostalism as it is now doing to Catholicism. I wonder if the mega-church phenomenon may not



be at its bubble’s bursting point. The bigger and bigger the church, the slicker and slicker the show, the less and less the whole thing resembles Christ and His cross. The mega-church is inconceivable without the microphone and the mega-church seems to be increasingly a kind of self-help movement rather than an expression of Christianity. It is big, it is rich and it is very consoling. And some Catholics think that imitating it is the only way to go.

In the Christian mystery bigger is not always better. Jesus often seemed to chase people away. He seemed to actually discourage followers by telling them this was going to be tough. As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go”, but Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head.” (Luke 9:57,58)

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And then there was that outrageous comment about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. That sent them away in droves.

And what about, “Sell what have, give to the poor and then come and follow me”?

For Jesus, smaller was sometimes to be preferred. He seemed to favor sacrificial faith over convenience.

“That’s just not the way to build up a big congregation! Think of how much more he could have done if he’d had a microphone, or maybe one of those big screens up on Calvary so that people knew the words to the songs.” (For the humor impaired: I am being ironic.)

Jesus and His disciples changed the world without the use of microphones. We are becoming indistinguishable from the world, one microphone at a time.

I have attended prayer meetings at which there were more microphones in the choir than there were people in the audience, I mean congregation. Part of the original genius of the Azusa Street revival was that there was no obvious leader. No one had the microphone because as yet there was no such thing. No one could electronically overpower the small quiet voice of the Holy Spirit. Rev. Seymour would come into the hall and hide behind two packing crates and people would begin to sing and prophecy, and to speak in strange tongues. The sick would be healed and the poor would have good news preached to them, all without the help of microphones. When a prayer group needs microphones, I believe it has gotten too large. Intimacy and sincerity evaporate and the pond has grown large enough to attract some very big fish, some of whom are interested in taking up a collection.

The greatest microphonic abuse I have witnessed at prayer meetings is amplified speaking in tongues. This, in my opinion, is idiotic. St. Paul comments on it in his first letter to the wacky Corinthians. It is perhaps salutary to remember that the central texts from which Pentecostalism draws its theology of “spiritual gifts” (so-called) is the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. St. Paul wrote these chapters (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 12, 13, 14)

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because the Corinthians had made a mess of the charismata.

*For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. (1 Cor. 14:2)*

If you are speaking to God, why do you need a microphone? I have heard “prayer leaders” say, “I want to help the people get excited about the Lord!” If the Holy Spirit doesn’t attend the meeting, all of your shouting and sweating isn’t going to help anyone “get excited.” It is an exercise of the flesh and not an encounter with God in the Spirit. You end up sounding like the priests of Baal about whom we read in the 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Kings.

*So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. (1 Kings 18:28)*

Lose the microphone and just maybe the Holy Spirit will get a word in edgewise at the prayer meeting.

Next week: “But if we lose the prayer meeting, how will they hear the teaching?”  
Teachings — the next big enemy of the Charismatic Renewal.

### PRAYER MEETING OR TEACHING SEMINAR?

(Letter to Kerry Zmatick continued, like you're surprised.)

I like prayer meetings. I really do. Despite my recent comments I think prayer meetings are a good thing. It's just that most prayer meetings aren't prayer meetings. They have more talking than praying.

In the early days of the Charismatic/Pentecostal movement, we were starved for teaching. Remember? This was 1968. Catholics had just rediscovered the Bible, some Catholics that is. As a child I had the Bible rammed down my gullet. I could never understand it when I heard Catholics say they didn't read the Bible in the good old days. All the great authorities I knew from my father to Monsignor O'Brien, the local pastor were always pushing the Bible.

One of my earliest memories is looking at the pretty pictures in the Bible while sitting on my mother's lap. We had Bible history, we owned Bibles, I had children's Bibles bought at the parish bookstore. I still have my mother's old Bible that she had as a school girl back in the first world war when Henry Ford was a ne'er do well farm boy down the road apiece. (His father thought he would never amount to much. Didn't do a lick of work, just sat in the barn all day tinkering with motors. I'm not making that up either.) When we cleaned out Grandma's attic we found all sorts of Bible study books in German from around the 1880's, and Grandma was as Catholic as a Cathedral gargoyle! We read the Bible. Trust me. Big family dinners usually ended with a Bible, a bottle of wine and a theological argument at the table. I thus can't figure out why people were hungry for teaching, but they were.

I got my start in the teaching biz right about then. In about 1970, I wandered into a prayer meeting in the old town section of Frostbite Falls and, when they found out I was in the seminary, I was appointed to lead the introductory seminar for those who were first time visitors to the prayer meeting. I was to explain the history, the Biblical nature

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and the theology of the Pentecostal movement and then field questions. It didn't matter that I had been coming to the prayer group for only a week and that I knew absolutely nothing about the topic I was supposed to explain. It didn't matter that I was a recently re-converted college student of questionable sanity and recent sobriety. (It was the groovy 60's, and I was a part-time hippy.) I had a pulse and was thinking about becoming a Catholic priest. It was all good.

That was what passed for teaching in the early days of the movement. If you could compose a sentence that contained both nouns and verbs and you mentioned God occasionally, you were golden. When there wasn't a likely victim to throw to the teaching hungry crowd, there were always plenty of non-Catholics who were willing to come and rustle, er... I mean, feed the sheep. It was rhetorical, theological bedlam. And I was in the thick of it, blathering away about something about which I knew almost nothing.

We were big on John 14 :25

*"All this I have spoken while still with you, but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

We interpreted this to mean that the Holy Spirit would infuse Biblical and theological knowledge. We failed to notice that the text says the Holy Spirit would remind us of what Jesus had said.

Discipleship precedes teaching. If you haven't learned anything then there is nothing of which the Holy Spirit can remind you. We appointed ourselves as teachers and ascribed to ourselves what amounted to infallibility. I am sure I have told you about one of great teachers of the Icelandic renewal to which I was the bishop's representative, a deacon who stood up before all the assembled leaders of the movement and directing his comments at me, and said, "I don't need a pope or a bishop or a priest to tell me what to say. I have the Holy Spirit." He also had a sweet deal with the movement's steering committee that gave him \$5,000 for a down payment for his a new car and also

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funneled thousands a year to the parish where he was employed, guaranteeing his job and his salary.

There were some really good teachers and there were some infallible, self appointed teachers in the renewal who taught things like smokin', drinkin' and dancin' were all mortal sins and that when the saints were raptured into heaven after the three days of darkness and the thousand years tribulation of the seven-headed beast the sinners who smoked, danced and drank would be left behind. And all this was going to happen on February 30<sup>th</sup> next year because a truck driver in Arkansas had taken a picture that was obviously Jesus walking on the clouds, but we didn't have to worry because we were saved and once saved, always saved. Oh, and you had to be re-Baptized by immersion because infant Baptism and sprinkling didn't work. (I may be exaggerating, but not by much. I think I still have a copy of the photo of Jesus walking on the clouds.)

We were hungry for teaching -- any kind of teaching -- and we would believe just about anything if it was said with enough intensity and phrased in Biblical sounding language. A prayer meeting had to have a teaching. The "leaders" met every week to plan these spontaneous prayer meetings and inevitably the question was asked, "Who is going to give the TEACHING this week?", or even "Whose turn is it to give the TEACHING this week?" It never occurred to us that it is nowhere written that a prayer meeting must have a teaching. Of course a prayer meeting had to have a teaching! That's somewhere in the Bible isn't it? So we created a whole class of quasi-ordained preachers, many of whom were cretins, some of whom were predators. We would even impose hands on them in blessing, asking for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It looked just like a Congregationalist ordination ceremony. The prayer meetings seem to have less and less prayer and more and more teaching. The teachers were a special group, the superstars of the movement. Exciting dynamic teaching was wonderful. It meant that I could sit in a padded seat and absorb. I could gauge my level of charismatic-ness by the frequency of my goose bumps during a good sermon without actually having to use any of the charisms in the service of others.

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An inspiring teacher was revered. His or her tapes and recordings would make the rounds of the groups. People came to meetings with tape recorders and note books, and if a teacher was really good, he would be invited to speak at a.... CONFERENCE! He was then in the big leagues. He would fly to places like Guatemala to give talks, meanwhile people from Guatemala would fly to Frostbite Falls to give talks. It occurred to me at one point, why don't the talkers from Guatemala just talk in Guatemala and the Frostbite Falls talkers just talk in Frostbite Falls. It would have saved a lot of money, and I still wonder where all those frequent flyer miles went. The big league teachers were on the road a lot and they weren't part of a community anymore, really. They didn't actually go to prayer meetings to pray. They went to give the TALK. And while they were on the road talking about the Christian life, their spouse would occasionally make new friends and sometimes their children would meet interesting new people in jail. It was, as I have already explained, bedlam — sometimes Bedlam and Breakfast. Prayer groups risked becoming fan clubs as people “piled up teachers to suit their own fancy.” (2 Tim 4:4)

There were a number of things that came together to change the meetings from places of spiritual power to a spectator sport. The hunger for knowledge was genuine, but somehow what we had always been taught wasn't exciting. People found most of the clergy boring, which in fact we often are. I remember the hushed buzz if a charismatic priest came to a meeting, even if he was boring. I also learned that if you yelled every fifth word for no good reason, waved your arms and turned red people would mistake this for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. (More about the anointing of the Holy Spirit later. It is a very real and wonderful thing and has nothing to do with shouting.) If you were a priest but weren't charismatic, well... needless to say, the 99.999% percent of priests who weren't Charismatic were a bit put off by the distinction. There were not many priests who took the whole Pentecostal thing very seriously and so the Holy Loons and the Sheep Rustling Ministers were happy to take up the Sacred Microphone in their stead. It is a heady thing to be a factory worker by day and then to have a microphone in your hand at night with 500 people hanging on your every word as if it were the voice of God, a heady thing indeed. I suspect that the factory work by day is much more

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Christ-like than the preaching at night. Let us not forget that Jesus was in the building trades for 18 years, and often tried to escape His fans. As the Pentecostal movement grew, and morphed into Charismatic Renewal, the big fish in the small ponds became a leadership elite. The power and intimacy of Pentecost faded. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit risked becoming a sort of entertainment.

I would suggest, that if you want to have real prayer meeting, dump the teaching. If you want to have teaching, have a teaching seminar. Don't confuse the two. Teachers must be tested. "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1) Anyone can pray, and "the Lord dwells in the praises of His people" (Psalm 22:3) not in the teaching of the leaders. Teaching is a very important thing, but it is not prayer. The apostles spent nine days in prayer; "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." (Acts 1:19)

Admittedly, they did pick a replacement for Judas, but even that was done by means of prayer. There is no mention that they did Bible Study for nine days. After the Holy Spirit fell on Pentecost, Peter delivered one of the great Bible studies of history, but it was the result of, not the cause of Pentecost. So, having dumped the microphone, I would suggest that you dump the teachings.

When you pray, pray. When you study, study, albeit prayerfully. There are lots of competent teachers out there now who take the charisms seriously. There is now and always has been plenty of good teaching in the Catholic Church. You don't need to find 20-year-old recently converted reprobates like me to guide you in the use of the Lord's favors.

When I came home from my first year of college I told my parents all about this new Pentecost, I told them that you could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and that God healed the sick and that the Bible was God's word and prophesy was real.

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They were mystified. They had always tried to teach me those things. That's why they had crammed the Bible down my throat ever since Henry Ford left the farm. I realized they were right and I stayed a Catholic.

I am awfully glad that I did.

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### DON'T PLAY FOLLOW THE LEADER

(Letter to Kerry Zmatick, which continues to drone on and on.)

It seems that there is really no one who can be called the father (or the mother) of modern Pentecostalism. [Charles Parham](#) led the Bible College, “Stone’s Folly” where the Pentecostal movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century started, but his ministry ended under a cloud. He was suspected of gross immorality and accused of financial irregularity. [Rev. William J. Seymour](#), who took the torch from Parham, was resented by Parham for doing so. Parham and Seymour parted company over theology and different styles of worship. Seymour was never recognized for his pivotal role in the emerging movement, quite probably because of the color of his skin. To look for a founder of the movement is like looking for the founder of a brush fire. There may be one, but after it’s started who really cares? Just run and hope the wind shifts. The Pentecostalism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the result of the holiness movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their dissatisfaction with the dryness of an excessively theological Protestantism. The movement was not about theology. It was about experience. That fact has never stopped anyone from trying to take theological charge of the movement.



Stone's Folly, home of Bethel Bible College

A bit of review: 1901 Stone’s Folly and Charles Parham was where it all started. Then 1905, the Azusa Street Revival and William Seymour is where it really got rolling. The traditional Protestant denominations thought the whole thing was nuts, and like the pietists before them, the Pentecostals were accused of being too Catholic. After all, Catholics had healing and visions and prophecies. A good Bible believing Protestant had no need of such things. People were thrown out of congregations, threatened and assaulted over the new Pentecost, so.....

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In 1914, about 300 Pentecostal “leaders” called a meeting in Hot Springs, Arkansas, to discuss the situation. Having been rejected by American Protestantism, they were moved by the Holy Spirit to form the perfect church, the Assemblies of God. There were some representatives at the gathering of already existing churches that had been Pentecostalized. They heard the Holy Spirit telling them not to form a new church, so they eventually formed the Independent Assemblies of God. There were pressing theological questions to be answered, such as, is one saved if one doesn’t speak in tongues? Theological statements were prepared, disagreed with and voted on, and the movement rolled on trying to define itself theologically.

Now there are at least twenty-two major Pentecostal denominations in North America with lots more non-denominational churches that make things up as they go along. The former include Church of God of the Original Mountain Assembly and the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church. Personally, I am thinking of starting Fire-Baptized Mountain Assembly Holiness Church because those are both really cool names.

The Protestant Pentecostal movement fractured over important questions such as can one go to heaven if one does not speak in tongues or does not dance about with rattlesnakes and drink poison. There are actually churches that believe this. They take Mark 16:18 very seriously:

*These signs will accompany those who have believed. In My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues. They will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*

Well, it’s reasonable after all. If you have to speak in tongues to go to heaven, why shouldn’t you also have to dance a fast tango with a cobra? The snake handling wing of the Pentecostal movement was founded in 1910 by George Hensley in the Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee. (Not Cleveland Ohio. Not enough rattlesnakes.) He soon quit the Church of God, having decided that all denominational churches were evil, and started his own denomination that required snake handling as evidence of salvation. Hensley eventually died from fatal snakebite in 1955. Oh well. Must not have had

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enough faith. Personally, I would just rather tithe and go to committee meetings as proof of salvation.

True Pentecostalism is not about theology. It is about spirituality and the very human experience of the Holy Spirit. When the whole thing sprouted up in the Catholic Church we didn't need a new theology to describe it. We had a perfectly good theology after these 2000 years. That didn't stop people from trying to take theological control of the movement.

The first thing was to try to figure out how these things fit into the sacramental structure of the Church. (My opinion is that they don't. They don't have to.) Much ink was spilled and much high blood pressure medicine taken over the question; "How does the baptism in the Holy Spirit relate to the sacraments of initiation and how is receiving of the Holy Spirit in Baptism related to the receiving of the Holy Spirit in the Baptism in the Holy Spirit after a Life in the Spirit Seminar?"

A common explanation was that what happened in the Baptism in the Holy Spirit was what was supposed to happen at Confirmation. I would disagree. What is supposed to happen at Confirmation happens at Confirmation, because Confirmation is a sacrament, a covenant that bestows God's grace. How grace unfolds is worth a lifetime of discovery. All these questions and the shaky answers rest on assumption and definitions, Protestant assumptions and definitions. The sacraments are the outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace. All these visions and healing and prophecies and experiences are not necessarily the grace of the sacraments. They are something else. They are religious experiences. Nothing more, nothing less. The sacraments are covenants made with the Lord. The charisms are favors from the Lord. We have assumed that the Protestants were right about these things. I don't think they were. That does not make these things any less real or any less important.

The juggernaut of theology rolled on in the Catholic Pentecostal movement unhindered. Pretty soon we weren't calling ourselves Pentecostals. We were calling ourselves "Charismatics" to make sure that people knew we were Catholic. The TEACHERS vied with one another to prove that they were thoroughly Catholic. Prophecies were pre-

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approved and the leadership of the prayer meetings got very picky. In our effort to make sure we were Catholic enough so bishops and priests would still let us use the church building for prayer meetings, we squeezed the life right out of the movement. It seemed somewhere in the 1980's that the Holy Spirit went out for a cup of coffee and some fresh air. Remember, I am just recounting my own experience. Yours might be quite different and your prayer group may just glow and shimmer with spontaneity and joy. My experience wasn't as pleasant. It involved financial stupidity and worse, manipulated elections and endless arguments over things that had nothing to do with the Lord. On to the horror stories.

I remember a series of heated meetings as to whether or not we should sell coffee mugs with the Renewal logo on them at the book table at a conference. That board, on which I served briefly, eventually had the bishop appoint them to indefinite terms of office when it looked like they were going to lose an election.

Then there was the treasurer of the regional Icelandic steering committee who was arrested for smuggling a gun across the border. He insisted that he was completely unaware of the contents of a package that he was carrying for a friend. He well may have been clueless. He was unaware of a great many things. The crazy-making part is not the gun-running. It is that while he spent months in the slammer in a third world country, he refused to step down as treasurer and would not let anyone else have the books. The president of the steering committee at the time liked to remind people that the pope was elected for life. Shouldn't the president of the Renewal be elected for life?

It took me three years of endless meetings, elections and squabbles to remove a board that had used the funds very creatively. After I had convinced them to leave quietly, a new board was elected and its new treasurer, who could barely add, refused to let anyone else see the books. Apparently, not getting to see the books was a long standing tradition. That was about the time I got a phone call from a prominent person in the "leadership" asking for monetary help with her taxes. I said "WHAT!?!?!" She said the old board use to help her out.....

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Oy! Sorry to rattle on, but I am having a lot of fun getting this out of my system. Let me continue. Another good one. The leadership made decisions about who got to stay at posh hotels free of charge during conventions, and who went on missionary journeys to tropical locations. Of course, the leadership always got rooms and trips taken care of. Once a leading somebody's cousin offered to save the Renewal a lot of money by having a cousin cater the meals during a Charismatic convention. We soon had the opposite of a healing service. People were passing out on all sides and the ambulances pulled out just as the bishop pulled up to give his talk. I watched him like a hawk to make sure that no one offered him a box lunch. The catering cousin quickly went for an extended visit to the old country.

So, my next suggestion: **Lose the leadership.**

"Heaven forefend!" I can hear you say. "How can we have a prayer meeting without the leadership?" Remember, you have already dumped the microphones and the teaching. Haven't you read the Bible? Leadership in the Kingdom of God should be called "waiter-ship."

*Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. (Luke 22:25, 26)*

The one who serves is literally the one who deacons, or the one who waits on tables. In one of the many committee meetings that are so important to the life of the church, there was a very grand fellow, who realized his own importance even better than the people around him. He aspired to the diaconate, because to be a deacon was to be a ranking member of the LEADERSHIP and of course it meant that you would be a first string TEACHER. I pointed out to him that the word deacon meant table waiter, or even busboy. He said that the term waiter was a rather pejorative term in his native language. I pointed out that it was a rather pejorative term in ancient Greek, too. Jesus wasn't a king in the eyes of the world, he was however a table waiter at times.

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You don't need leaders and teachers in a real prayer meeting. You may need someone who will set up the chairs in the hall, unlock and re-lock the doors, make the coffee and set out the cookies. Oh, and to make sure that there is toilet paper in the bathroom and that it's clean. That's Christian leadership. Even the pope makes his own bed these days. I have been personally served breakfast by three archbishops. One of them was actually a pretty good cook. He is a great archbishop.

Next week: How can we possibly do without a leadership to tell us how to feel when we are praying?

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### LET'S GO TO THE DUMP

Letter to Kerry Zmatick, (as if anyone is still reading this nonsense.)

Once again, the best definition of a prayer meeting: "A gathering of the people of God for the free exercise of the gifts of God."

We have already dumped the microphones and, more importantly, the teaching and the teachers. There is still a problem. Prayer meetings have always attracted a group of people whom I call the "Sacred Screwballs," or the "Loons of the Lord." They have a tendency to see the prayer groups as their own private therapy group. Shouldn't there be leaders to pounce on them when they begin to dominate the prayer group? This question is related to the wider problem which I call "the Church oughta do something about this..."

People come up to me all the time and say, "Father, you need to tell that lady in the eighth pew on the left who wears enough perfume to gag a goat that she should tone it down."

To which I respond, "Have you told her that?"

To which the complainer usually responds, "Oh no, Father. That would be impolite. I would never dare to do that. What would she think? You're the pastor. Isn't it your job?"

No, it is not my job. It's your job. My job as pastor is still two steps away.

***"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. If they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."*** (Matt: 18:15-18)

That means you talk to them, then if they don't listen, go to them with a couple other people in the group and then if they still don't listen. Discuss it publicly in the group. Right there in the prayer meeting. Right out loud. In front of everybody!!! But isn't that impolite? No, it's honest, and it's what Jesus tells us to do. No one person should be able to foist his agenda on a group of people. That's not what a prayer meeting is for.

Let us consider some scenarios. One of God's little helpers comes to the prayer meeting with

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the express purpose of getting everyone into the “Eighteen Hail Mary Every Leap Year Devotion” that St. Baldric received during an ecstatic vision and which he explains for us in his third locution for St. Swiven’s Day. It becomes evident our devotee of St. Baldric is going into a rant of more than two or three minutes.



If you — “Who me?” “Yes, you!” — are uncomfortable with the direction of the rant, take authority. Raise your hand and say, “We don’t have teachings at our meeting. Perhaps you can share this with us over coffee.” Say it with a smile. Pretend to be open-minded and tolerant. If they refuse to shut up at that point, then a couple of you can ask to see the Locutor outside, and explain the situation. If the Locutor is still intent on taking over your prayer group, bring it up in front of the whole group. This is the Biblical “One, Two, Three or More Ecclesial Heave Ho” approach.

Pretty soon people will stop using your little prayer and praise group as private therapy. It’s hard at first, but it really works. When someone wants to take over the group let him know right away, that is not what we are here for. You have no teaching — maybe a brief testimony, two or three minutes, a prophetic word, but never more than two or three of those. That’s what St. Paul says. (1Cor. 14:29)

I get the biggest kick out of these conventions where five or ten prophets line up at the microphone with their prophetic note books in hand and start off with “My little children....” Haven’t these people read the Bible? If someone writes a prophecy down, you can pretty much count on it not being a prophecy, unless of course it’s Isaiah or Habakkuk or one of that crowd.

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What about prayer for the sick? I would suggest that if someone asks for prayer let the group pray for them. If a lot of people ask for prayer, pray for the sick and the needy at the end of the meeting. By no means allow a collection to be taken up at any prayer meeting. Any money collected must be accounted for by the parish office. That's the law.

"But how will we meet expenses?"

What expenses?

"There's always cake and coffee at the end of the meeting. How does that get paid for?"

Have people bring a coffee cake. Don't take up any kind of collection. Few things corrupt a group faster than petty cash. If you have to have any committees, make it a cleanup committee. Remember Jesus said that true leadership is about being a busboy or busgirl. (Is that a word?) If some representative of the group needs to be sent on a mission, it should be a member of the clean up committee.

Speaking as pastor, I can tell you these are our favorite committees. If somebody does clean up, I tend to listen to them. If someone comes in and says, "Roving Avars have stolen everything we own," and asks to take up a collection. Don't do it. It is against diocesan and IRS rules and 99.999% of the time it is a scam.

I remember a poor fellow who would come to a prayer group with his desperately ill son in a wheel chair and weep as he explained his plight. Outside, after the meeting his kid would get out of the wheel chair, pack it in the car's trunk and move on to the next prayer group. You are on for charity in your private lives, but not at the prayer group. You are not a church. You are a prayer group — nothing more, nothing less. Remember what the Lord said, "Where you find the corpse, the vultures will gather." (Matt. 24:28) Believe me I've known a lot of vultures who never missed a prayer meeting.

How will we make decisions?

What decisions? Decisions on theology are the responsibility of the church, not the prayer group. Decisions such as what time should we start the meeting — the meeting starts when the church hall is opened and someone starts praying.

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How will we decide when the meeting is over?

It's over when people have prayed long enough. If you want to pray for an hour and a half, pray for an hour and a half. If someone else want to stay praying until midnight, what harm is there in that? Go home. Get some rest. Do what the Spirit prompts you to do, not what everyone else is doing. (I would, however suggest that those who want to pray through the night be automatically made members of the clean up committee.) If there is a decision to be made, ask the Holy Spirit. If that fails, ask the pastor. That will surprise him.

How do you ask the Holy Spirit?

It's easy. Someone in the group asks the question: "Lord, should we have blueberry muffins or walnut muffins after the meeting?" Then pray. If a consensus forms, you've got a decision, a consensus being two thirds plus one. If it's good enough to elect a pope, it's good enough to decide on pastry. If there is a majority, that's not good enough. Don't do anything until you've got a consensus. Remember what the disciples said in the Acts of the Apostles. "It seems good to us and to the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 15:28)

Also, smaller is better. All you need for a prayer meeting is two or three people. Small can be a good thing. Remember, you've got no microphones, so if the group gets too big, start a second group. Meet in your homes until there is no more room, and then meet in the church hall or in a classroom. **DON'T MEET IN A CHURCH!!!** (unless you are going to behave yourself.)

In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament there is no conversation, no shouting, and no prophecy. You are in the Great Presence. Everything should be directed at the Lord, present in the Eucharist. Prophecy is directed to the hearers, not to the Lord. We are in the presence of the Lord in His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. Our prophesying is imperfect. Let the perfect Presence speak in its silence without you kibitzing.

A prayer meeting is not to be confused with Eucharistic Adoration. They are two different things. If you are going to have a prayer meeting, meet downstairs where you can swing from the chandeliers, shout at the top of your lungs, jump up and down, share testimonies about the Lord's wonders and have coffee in Styrofoam cups along with your blueberry (or walnut) muffins. I love that kind of prayer meeting. It is abhorrent, however, to do all that, especially the Styrofoam cups, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

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“But the prayer meeting is so wonderful with the Blessed Sacrament present! There are so many blessings!”

Fine, go upstairs and be blessed, just mind your manners, because when you are in the presence of the Sacrament, you are not at a prayer meeting. You are in the presence of the Great King. Behave that way!

So let’s get this straight: dump the teaching, dump the microphone, dump the leadership, dump the collections, dump guest lecturers — invited and uninvited, dump the time schedule, dump meetings in the church. (I suppose meetings in the church are okay if they really are prayer and praise.)

What will this bozo want us to dump next?

I’ll tell you what this bozo really wants! Dump the music ministry.

Next week: “Be still and know that I am God.”

### YOU DON'T NEED PROFESSIONALS TO "MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE"

Letter to Kerry Zmatick, continued (please, won't somebody put a stop to this endless harangue?)

Let us again refer to St. Paul.

"When you come together, let each of you have a psalm..." 1Cor. 14 26.

This will never work. You can't just let anybody sing at a prayer meeting. A prayer meeting has to have a music ministry, the purpose thereof, to get the people going and to make the whole thing a better experience of worship. (What this really means is that a meeting without decent music can be numbingly boring.) We are a spectator society. We want to have someone else do the work for us.

When I was a lad, we still used to learn how to play a musical instrument and would sing while we dried the dishes. Now we put the dishes in the dishwasher and watch television. The Charismatic Renewal has a strong element of the consumer culture.

"How do you expect me to pray without someone leading worship and a decent music ministry? I come to prayer meetings to be uplifted."

Oh. I thought you came to praise the Lord. I have actually heard people say, "Tonight we'll have to cancel the prayer meeting. We don't have any music!" What they actually mean is that they have no one to play instruments. The old ladies I mentioned earlier who would lock themselves in church for the night with pillows and coffee pots had music. They had it in their hearts and souls. They would come armed with nothing but tambourines and determination and they would sing for hours as the Holy Spirit prompted them. I am not against good music, but again, one can structure the brains out of a prayer meeting.

The point of a prayer meeting is to hear from the Holy Spirit. I have been to prayer meetings that seem more like a show with five or six acts. If there is a lull in the doings the choir gets up, goes to the microphones and sings an inspiring number and when

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they are done the prayer group leader says “Let’s all stand up and really just praise the Lord.”

When I was a lad and first involved in these things, our group had an out-of-tune piano and an old lady for the music ministry. Somebody in the meeting would start an old chorus like, “We see the Lord, He is high and lifted up..” The piano would chime in exactly on key. (I call this the charismatic gift of ukalalia. For the humor impaired, I am joking.) We would sing those words from Isaiah over and over again, because in our hearts we did see the Lord, high and lifted up. (Isaiah 6:1) I remember a night of wonderful testimonies and as each of us shared a story of what the Lord had done in the past week, we would break into the old chorus “In the name of Jesus, we have the victory...” It was schmaltzy, it was childish and it was wonderful fun. Nothing was planned, no two songs were alike, and no one led music.

As I said, I have nothing against good music, or even bad music for that matter. My problem is with self-aggrandizing music. I remember a retreat for all the prayer group choirs in Frostbite Falls. I asked if any of the choirs ever went into the church privately and serenaded Our Lord in the tabernacle. Of the thirty or forty prayer group choirs present, one said they actually did that regularly. I was shocked that one choir actually had thought of it. I expected no one to have made music just for the Lord.

I once read an old article from a Boston newspaper that read, “At yesterday’s gathering the Rev. Doctor Blatherworth delivered the finest prayer ever offered to a Boston audience.” It could also have read, “the finest hymn ever sung to a prayer group.” If you have a music ministry that is absolutely in love with the Lord and which sings and plays solely because they love the Lord, that’s great. If you know of such a group, I’d like to meet them.

You know how to tell such a group? I’ve already said it. Take away their microphones. I have had more difficulties with prayer group choirs than I care to remember — power struggles, hurt feelings when a lead singer is replaced, choir directors storming out, recriminations about failure to attend practices, fights about money and record profits.

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You can tell when a Charismatic music ministry is on the skids spiritually. They decide to record an album. Then they get invitations to go to other meetings get invited to do conferences. They have finally made the big time. Incidentally, one can buy their recordings at the book table.

“But Father, we are doing this to help people. They can listen to our music at home and in their cars and feel closer to the Lord.”

They may feel closer to the Lord, but God would rather they BE closer to Him by obeying His perfect will. When it’s about how you feel, it’s no longer about the Lord.

Church choirs need practice, but I would venture that a real prayer group choir shouldn’t practice, except when they are going to sing in a locked church before the Tabernacle with no spectators present. Offer the best to the Lord, but let the Holy Spirit inspire the prayer meeting. No practices, no microphones, no adoring fans. Do it for the Lord. If there are no musicians, sing songs yourself — flat, out of key, rasping, cat-howling songs. If they come from the heart and are inspired by the love of God, Heaven will really enjoy them, just as you enjoy songs that your children make up. A prayer meeting is a gathering of the people of God for the free exercise of the gifts of God. It is not a polished liturgical performance for the amusement of the congregation. So, dump the music ministries. Keep the music but dump the music ministries.

Next, the absolute worst idea of all! Dump the Charismatic Mass. It is a liturgical abuse of the worst kind. Mass is the unbloody re-presentation of Calvary, not of Pentecost. Mass is the solemn Sacrament, the New Covenant in the Blood of Christ.

You must be tired of my telling you that the Latin word *Sacramentum* means an “oath to the death.” I go to Mass to swear my blood oath to give my life for Christ and His Bride, the Church. I certainly receive at Mass, if I am properly disposed to God’s grace, but that is not why I go to Mass. I go to offer my life with His on the altar. That’s why we call it the sacrifice of the Mass. We don’t call it the sacrifice of the prayer meeting. Mass is a covenant ceremony and as such it is a carefully and beautifully structured liturgy.

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“But I get so much more out of a Charismatic Mass! I am so bored at those regular Masses.”

You sound like the kind of person who, standing at the foot of Christ’s cross, would have gotten bored about an hour and a half into the crucifixion and gone off to see if there were a concession stand nearby. If Christ had been crucified in a mega-church, at least then you could have gone out to the lobby and gotten a cappuccino.

There is nothing spontaneous about Mass. Everything should be spontaneous about a prayer meeting. It seems that, sometimes, Charismatics want spontaneous Masses and structured prayer meetings! Have a prayer and praise session before Mass. Pray for the sick after Mass, but please let Mass be Mass. To conform Mass to a particular modern taste is to cut it off from the wellsprings of history and the communion of the Church. Mass is something we do in fellowship with a billion people alive today and with billions more who have left this world or have not yet entered it. At Mass we are made one with all believers in space and in time and beyond time.

At a prayer meeting we struggle to hear the Holy Spirit. Mass is worship. A prayer meeting is not worship. A prayer meeting is wonderful in its prayer and praise, but Mass is true worship, because there is no worship worthy of the Majesty of Heaven, except the perfect sacrifice of the Son of God on Calvary. My hand-clapping enthusiasm is a wonderful thing, but it cannot compare to the Blood shed on the altar of the Cross.

When people invite me to say a Charismatic Mass, I always say, “Sorry, I only know how to say a Catholic Mass,” and I mean exactly that. The structured nature of the Mass makes it universal. I am doing what they do in India and Africa and China and in Heaven. A prayer meeting is a wonderful thing. In a sense, it is the opposite of universal. It is local.

The Holy Spirit makes the universal and unchanging Word of God specific to the needs and the situation of a small local group. This is a good thing. The intimacy of the prayer group is wonderful. It should not be made liturgical. It is not meant to have a structure. It is meant to be spontaneous. A good prayer meeting can make the Mass more

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meaningful but it is not the Mass. Don't confuse them. Dump the Charismatic Mass, no matter how nice it is and how good it feels.

Next week: What is this speaking in tongues nonsense?

### SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Letter to Kerry Zmatick, the Grand Finale (Which should only take two or three weeks — four or five at most. Probably.)

When one think elephant one thinks “trunk”. When one thinks of things Pentecostal/Charismatic, one thinks of speaking in tongues. There is a lot more to elephants than trunks and there’s more to Pentecostalism than speaking in tongues, but still, it wouldn’t be an elephant without the trunk.

Speaking in tongues or with tongues — also called the gift of tongues, glossolalia and, by some, babbling in Babylonian — is ridiculous, embarrassing and undignified and these are merely a few reasons why it is a very good thing. Glossolalia is a Greek word that means “speaking in tongues”. It is the word preferred by snobbish pseudo-scholarly people and — being a snobbish pseudo scholar — I will now employ the word instead of the less impressive “speaking in tongues”. People regularly tell the Lord, “I give you everything I am and have.” When the Lord confers glossolalia on a person he is taking the last shred of their dignity. They babble like children spouting nonsense words and surely we don’t want to be like little children. Who would even ask such a thing? (cf. Matthew 18:2-4) I have spoken in tongues on a daily basis for just short of 46 years and it is still embarrassing to admit it, even as I write this, the thought crosses my mind, “What will my eight faithful readers think of me?”

So, what is glossolalia in tongues? Once again, let us repair to the Bible, that big book on the coffee table.

*When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at*

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*this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.'"*

The text goes on to say that three thousand were converted and baptized that day.

When I was a lad, we were taught that glossolalia was a means by which the apostles were able to preach in languages they didn't know. That's not what's going on here. Everyone who was gathered outside the "house" where the disciples were gathered had at least two languages in common, many had three, some had four. There was no need for a gift of foreign language in the context. Everyone there spoke Aramaic and Hebrew, and probably Greek. Many would have added Latin to the three they already could recognize. What was happening at Pentecost was the symbolic reversal of the tower of Babel. Human beings had been divided by different speech and culture. The Church that was founded by Jesus became universal, in Greek "Catholic" that day. It became apostolic, that is missionary, an outreach to the whole world and not just to one ethnicity. This is why the Catholic Church has always regarded Pentecost as its birthday.

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The next clear discussion of glossolalia we have in the text of scripture comes later in chapter 10, verse 44 of the Acts of the Apostles.

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."*

In both instances, Pentecost and the encounter with Cornelius you are seeing what you might see at a good rollicking prayer meeting: everyone going nuts and babbling away and shouting "praise the Lord!" among other things. It seems that this is not unlike what the prophetic bands and schools of the prophets did in the Old Testament. As a pastor, were I to see a band of prophets coming toward me I would hide quaking in one of the confessionals. Just listen!

*And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets? And one of the same place answered and said, But who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Samuel 10:11-12)*

AND

*And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Samuel 19:24)*

At least this sort of thing doesn't go on among Charismatics.... I hope. Prophecy is a messy business, all the manifestations of the Holy Spirit are prophecies in a certain sense. Jesus didn't heal the sick so they could go back to their bowling league. He healed them in order to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Think about it. All those who

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were healed by Jesus ultimately became ill again and died. Even those he raised from the dead die again. Jesus worked His signs and wonders to say with more than words that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

Glossolalia is jarring. That is its purpose. It is jarring to the person who prays that way and jarring to the person who hears it. No one leaves a good Pentecostal meeting saying “It was a lovely service, Reverend.” They usually say something like, “All you people are out of your minds!!!” Then they come back next week to figure out the nature of the insanity. If you’ve ever witnessed someone standing up at a meeting and loudly proclaiming something that seems to be a language but it’s utterly unintelligible to all the hearers, you don’t forget it. All true prophetic words and actions stop you in your tracks. You want to get out of there and go some place normal. That is precisely the point. The Kingdom of God is not business as usual. One thing a real Pentecostal meeting isn’t: boring. Weird, yes — but never boring.

Shock value is certainly not the only purpose of glossolalia. It is also a very useful way of praying. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul says,

*“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through un-expressible groans, and He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” (Romans 8:26, 27)*

Let me translate into English. Sometimes you just don’t know how to pray, or there are no words to express your gratitude and wonder. The Holy Spirit gives us a way to pray that is beyond words. It is verbal, non-mental prayer. In this sense it is not unlike the Rosary. PAY ATTENTION! I AM NOT SAYING THAT GLOSSOLALIA IS THE SAME AS, OR AS GOOD AS, OR BETTER THAN THE ROSARY!!! I am simply saying that glossolalia occupies a similar place in the human psyche. It too, in part is verbal non-mental prayer.

I learned this from a very holy bishop who was trying his best to figure out this Charismatic business. He realized that when the Charismatics prayed in tongues they

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were doing the same thing he did when he prayed the Rosary. It wasn't the words that mattered. It was simply that he was allowing the Holy Spirit to give him a way to express the wonder of God's love by repeating the angel's greeting to our Blessed Mother, who is the very model of true. It was verbal non-mental prayer. There the similarity ends. St Paul says, "I will pray with the spirit, I will pray with the mind also." (1Cor.14:15) The Rosary is both verbal/non-mental and mental prayer. We are invited to meditate on the Mysteries of the life of our Lord as well as to speak in prayer. There are people who try to say the Rosary, precisely, carefully, consciously. My hat is off to them. In actual Catholic practice, the *Aves* and *Paters* and *Glorias* that make up most of the Rosary are said thoughtlessly and lovingly. It is just good to be in the Presence of the Lord. I would say that the little Rosary groups who linger after Mass are wonderfully spirit-filled.

Next Week: How this glossolalia business works.

### INEXPRESSIBLE GROANS IN A HONDA

Letter to Kerry Zmatick, (Must he drone on and on and on?)

Glossolalia as I said in my last thrilling installment is verbal non-mental prayer. In this it has some commonality with the Rosary. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, ***“We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through inexpressible groanings.”*** Sometimes you just don’t know how to pray, or even what to pray for. That’s the primary practical use of glossolalia.

Glossolalia is a spontaneous, though not uncontrolled, experience. I first spoke in tongues after hanging up a phone. I was so filled with joy after the conversation in which I learned about this whole business that when I ran out of hymns to sing I started praying in tongues. It seemed like the most natural thing in the world. An old college roommate was very unsettled one morning. He looked at me and said “Not only do you pray in strange sounding languages when you are awake, but now you are singing in them in your sleep!!!”

I noticed the other day when I dropped by a church to go to confession that the Blessed Sacrament was on the altar. (For non-Catholics, The Blessed Sacrament is another way to say the consecrated communion wafer that we believe is the body, blood, soul and divinity of the whole Christ. Sometime we bring the Sacrament out of the tabernacle, a little box where it/He is kept, and we spend time in His company. You should try it even if you’re not Catholic. It is very sweet to spend a quiet hour in prayer with Jesus present physically as well as spiritually. It is like a taste of heaven.) Where was I? Oh yes I noticed that the blessed Sacrament was on the altar and I knelt to pray, and after a few minutes I noticed my lips were moving and I was quietly praying in tongues. No shouting. No rolling on the floor. No waving my hands around. Just a simple quiet mumbling that couldn’t be heard by anyone except for Him. My spirit was praying before I knew I was praying. The Holy Spirit was helping me in my weakness.

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Long before I was a priest I was keeping company with a young woman. (On the up and up -- We were both good Catholics at the time). She had been a non-believer when I met her, but had come with me to some prayer meetings and had encountered the Lord. Being a doctrinaire Pentecostal with a capital P at the time, I nagged her about "when are you gonna get 'baptized' in the Holy Spirit. She would glare at me and say, "When and if God wants to!" Well she "got baptized in the Holy Spirit" but did not speak in tongues. I nagged her again. "When are you gonna get the gift of tongues?" Again she glared and said, "When God wants to give me the gift of tongues!!!" A while later as she was riding the subway, she noticed that she was quietly praying in tongues. All my nagging had nothing to do with it. Wisely, we drifted apart. I would have made her crazy in the long run.

There is nothing contrived or forced about glossolalia if it's the real thing. There is a lot out there that seems to me anything but the real thing. Remember a month or two or three ago when I explained that the crazy politics of the American colonies insisted that in order to be a citizen of a religious colony one had to give proof of "election" that is of being among the chosen? Since then, certain sects have become obsessed with the "evidence of salvation".

I know someone who was raised in a very Pentecostal sect that believes in order to be counted among the elect, that is to be able to say I am saved, it is necessary to speak in tongues at least once in your life. It's perfectly logical. In order to be saved you must be able to say that Jesus is Lord. The Bible says that no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit, and if you don't speak in tongues you must not have the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot possibly be saved. Eazy peazy! A=B=C=CRAZY. When people tell me they "have the Holy Spirit", I tell them I am much more interested in whether or not the Holy Spirit has them.

That's the real meaning of glossolalia. It's not evidence that one has the Holy Spirit. It is a way, among many, to let the Holy Spirit have you. This is true of all the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. They exist not for evidence, nor for individual advantage, but for the common good. By the way, the above mentioned friend is now a devout Catholic and a

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professor and I do not believe he has ever spoken in tongues. I do suspect that he is still heaven bound. He and his wife are a lot holier than I am.

Some of God's special friends think speaking in tongues is an absolute requirement. If you don't "have" the gift of tongues, you don't "have the Holy Spirit, and you are not a member of the club. These people will back you into a corner until they are convinced you have spoken in tongues. I remember a preacher whose specialty was helping people to "release the gifts of the Holy Spirit." He would have people repeat — and mind you I am not making a word of this up --- He would have people repeat the phrase "come and take a ride in my Honda." Soon they would be babbling away and, hallelujah! they had received the gift of tongues.

Give me a break. I don't think the Lord works this way. Perhaps I am wrong, but I suspect that if you force something it is certainly not a gift, and probably not a manifestation of anything, except perhaps a need for an increase in one's medication. I remember the story of a Presbyterian minister who went into a Pentecostal church to see what all the hubbub was about and before the night was over the congregation had pounced on him with the laying on of hands to get an actual Presbyterian baptized in the Holy Spirit. They weren't going to let him go until he had been baptized in the Holy Ghost, and that wasn't going to happen until he spoke in tongues. After a half an hour or so he decided to end the nonsense by praying the Our Father in Greek, having studied Classical Greek in divinity school. There were shouts of acclamation and they let him leave. Later that night, in the privacy of his own home, the Lord filled him with His Presence and the fellow quietly and peacefully began to pray in tongues as the Holy Spirit prompted him.

Speaking in tongues has a certain sign value, but its greater value is a quiet means of speaking from the heart. Its primary use is for intercessory prayer, as it often is with the Rosary. St. Paul makes this clear in his First Letter to the Corinthians (14:2 and following)

***"Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them they utter mysteries by the***

***Spirit. ...I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy....Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church....If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding...When you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified....I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue."***

St. Paul makes it clear that, while he considers this a useful gift, it is not the most important thing. The belief that it is in any way necessary for salvation or even for a full spiritual life is exactly opposite to the sense of Scripture. Above all, St. Paul does not consider this a liturgical gift. It seems in the early Church there were instances of enthusiastic praying in the Spirit such as Pentecost or the house of Cornelius the Centurion and a few other instances, but the idea that glossolalia was used liturgically is unfounded. It is a remarkably quiet gift which can also be used communally in a kind of prophetic worship.

I am often asked is glossolalia a real language? I have no idea. Once many years ago, before I had studied Polish, I was at a prayer meeting, a real barn burner of a meeting. A little old nun came up to me and asked me if I spoke Polish. I said no, and she said "You've been praying in Polish for the last half hour!"

I remember the testimony of an Irish priest who had spent years with an obscure ethnic group in Africa. He was one of the few outsiders who could speak their language. His assignment was over. He had been reassigned to Boston and was feeling very much alone. He was out walking one evening, and from over a garden wall, he heard that language that he had spoken for so many years and now longed to hear once again. He rushed to the garden gate and under a tree he found a man, obviously not African, who knelt with eyes closed, pouring his heart out to the Lord. The fellow it turns out had just been prayed over and had received the manifestation of glossolalia.

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I could go on and on with stories, as you well know, but suffice it to say there is something real and precious about glossolalia. There is also something that is borderline wacko about a fixation with it. I have no idea if glossolalia is a real language; my suspicion is that it is as much a gift of ears as of tongues. On Pentecost the hearers didn't say, "These men are speaking our languages." They said, "We can HEAR them in our own languages."

I know of no instance of someone recording glossolalia and identifying a known language. I have heard linguists who study the phenomenon say it certainly has the cadence and feel of a language, if it is a genuine experience, and not just "wanting to ride in a Honda." Glossolalia is not necessarily a supernatural ability to speak a foreign language, though this has been recorded in the history of the faith. It is a language of the soul that cries out to God. If you want to know more about the whole business, read John Sherrill's book "*They Speak with Other Tongues*." It's a classic, not the best theology, but a classic nonetheless. Better still, if you want to know more, ask the Holy Spirit.

Just don't let anyone take you for a ride in their Honda.

(I sincerely apologize. I am not done. More next week)

### OF HEALING AND PROPHETS AND BEING SLAIN

Letter to Kerry Zmatick, (Could it be? Yes! The end!!!)

There are a few more phenomena to discuss before I quit fulminating.

Healing. I have seen real healings, but for a Catholic this is nothing new. We have always believed in healing. We just don't understand it. Have you ever noticed that Jesus didn't heal everyone in the Holy Land? He just healed a few. If Jesus could alleviate suffering, why didn't he alleviate everyone's suffering? My guess is that his healing ministry is meant to be a foretaste of heaven and not just a cheap medical plan. Not only did Jesus heal only a few, but all those he healed eventually got sick again and ultimately died. Even Lazarus whom he raised from the dead eventually died again.

What can the point of healing possibly be if it is only a stop gap measure? In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the "Lord, bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." (Acts 14:3) Miracles and healing are exactly that: "signs and wonders that bear witness to grace." They are not given for the sake of convenience, but for the sake of the Gospel.

I once had a friend who had been stricken with polio in the great polio epidemic of the early 50's. He was severely paralyzed from the waist down. His family took him to the healing shrine of St. Anne de Beaupre in Canada. He was waiting in his wheelchair to be taken forward for prayer when a severely crippled young woman was brought forward before him and as she passed him, their eyes met. There was a great commotion up in front and the girl whom my friend had just seen was completely and instantly healed. She strode back past him walking on two good legs and their eyes met again. In that moment he realized he would not be healed and that was alright. God's grace would be sufficient in his life. And so it was.

There isn't time to tell you about all the people I have seen healed, and all the people I have seen not healed. The message is the same. It is that grace that is sufficient even though health in this world is of limited duration.

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The hunger most people have for healing is understandable. The suffering and pain that is the common lot of human beings is not to be taken lightly. People long for healing, especially the parents of sick children. It is hard to accept that, as the Lord said to St. Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9)

I don’t want to be weak. I don’t want to depend on grace. Healing is given to increase our dependence on grace, not to lessen it. Most people want healing because they want not only an end to their suffering but the freedom that health confers. I remember a neon sign on a west side Pentecostal church that billed itself as a healing church. The sign brightly proclaimed, “Why should you suffer when others are being healed?” Nothing about Christ, just an end to suffering.

That is not the point of healing. Healing is a sign and a wonder meant to draw us into a deeper trust in the Lord. How often have I been asked to offer healing Masses? I cringe at the request. Every Mass is a healing Mass. “Speak but the word and my soul shall be healed.” It is a beautiful thing to see a few believers gathered around a sick person praying for healing. It is a sad spectacle to see people lined up around the block waiting to get into the church because the faith healer is scheduled to do his thing at 7PM.

Just this morning I saw something that moved me deeply. I go to the gym every morning and chug around in circles like some moribund hamster. As I passed the whirlpool for the umpteenth time, I saw an old Korean man holding his wife’s hands as they sat in the pool. Their eyes were closed and he was quietly praying. I knew what was going on. He was praying for his dear wife’s aches and pains. He understood that God’s grace was better than the warm water. He was commending her to the Lord. It was beautiful to watch his tender affection for his wife. That is what healing is about.

There is a corollary to healing; it is called “being slain in the Spirit.” It is a wonderfully goofy manifestation which is only vaguely alluded to in the Bible, but we Pentecostals and Charismatics just love it. And, like all of this, it is real and it is easily abused. In the Gospel we read that those who came to arrest Jesus fell to the ground, just as St. Paul

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fell to the ground on the Damascus road. Saul fell to the ground in the Books of the Kings when he met the prophets. It often happens that when a person is being prayed for a very disorienting peace comes over them and they collapse.

This has happened to me many a time and I must say it is one of the most peaceful feelings I have ever had. One just totally relaxes. You don't lose consciousness. You're standing, but you realize there is no really good reason to be standing and over you go. You usually just lay there for a while wearing a silly grin on your face. It's has no great purpose as far as I can tell, and it is completely unimportant. It is a very gentle experience of resting in the Lord's presence.

Needless to say, it is all the rage at faith healing services, Charismatic Masses and spirit filled conferences. If you didn't fall over, there must be something wrong with you. Or, if the faith healer/conference speaker is really good, they fall over by the busload when prayed for. That's how you can tell that the conference speaker is the real thing. You fall



over. If there is not sufficient falling over, it's obvious that the Holy Spirit hasn't really shown up. What you get then are people who keep coming up for prayer until they fall over. Or even worse you have the pushers and the catchers. A pusher is a faith healer who as he prays over a person gives them a shove on the forehead when he's done. The catcher is someone who stands behind the "pray-ee" to keep them from cracking their heads open when they go over. I have often cringed at the thwack of a cranium hitting the cold marble of a church floor.

I remember a very distressed woman asking my advice after a meeting. She was worried that God hadn't blessed her because she hadn't fallen over. When I used to

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pray for people at these services, I would have them kneel at the altar rail or sit so that they couldn't do much damage as they fell. This falling out business is a fine thing, if it's real. If it's contrived it's just silly. Healing is real, but when it becomes a cottage industry, it's time to move on to more important things, like repentance.

Three more gifts and I'm done. They are related, the word of knowledge, discernment of spirits and prophecy. St. Paul sums it all up when he says "You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols..." (1Cor. 12:2) That's the amazing thing about the Lord. If we are ready to listen, He speaks. If an individual or a congregation sincerely wants to hear the Lord, they will hear him. No one ever hears him perfectly. Remember that St. Paul says, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." (1Cor.13:9) Still, if we get Him wrong, but our desire to obey is genuine, I have found that He makes up the slack.

Most of the prophecies that I have heard are pretty much hokum. I cannot count the number of times I have heard that the Lord is returning next Tuesday, or some such nonsense. I have heard endless soliloquies that claim to be prophecy. They are usually just filler in a boring prayer meeting. A real prophecy, as St. Paul tells us, cuts to the heart. The only real prophecies I have heard have been very personal and very much to the point. No soliloquies.

Once I walked into a prayer meeting, and a real prophet looked at me and said, "Father is going to be sent to work with the poorest of the poor." I had been asked that very day to move to a very poor parish in very bad part of town. I was "praying" about it and planning to say, "No thanks." The Lord threw His two cents in by means of someone who had a real prophetic gift, even though I was not very interested in the Lord's opinion at that moment. I was so jolted that I told my superiors that I would accept the assignment and was at that parish for twenty of the happiest years of my life.

Prophecies are not sweet nothings whispered in our soul's ear by the Holy Spirit. They are marching orders. They are usually not about the future, they about the sovereignty of God in our lives. I believe that God has people in every congregation who can read

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souls, who can tell when a spirit is from the Lord or from the enemy, and that He has given people who can help us to know His will for us. If any clergy are making the mistake of reading these rants, know that if the Lord has given you prophets in your life, you are a very blessed person. I will always be grateful to the Lord for the honest prophets He has sent me. When they speak, they do so with authority. They have never been afraid to say what they think I don't want to hear, and the few times I have been wise enough to listen, they have been blessings from the Lord.

One more thing. There is a phrase that one finds in Scripture and that Pentecostal/Charismatics love to bandy about: "In the Spirit." I have pondered its meaning for years, and I think I understand it a little, now that I am old. The Greek New Testament word that is usually translated "Spirit" is "*pneuma*". It means breath or wind, as in "to have the wind knocked out of you." We get words like pneumonia and pneumatic drill from it. When you go into a church and stick your hand in the holy water fountain and say "In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", you are really saying "In the name of the ... Holy Breath." The third person of the Holy Trinity is the called Holy Breath. In confirmation one is anointed with oil for the strengthening with the Holy Breath, and so on. The Holy Breath.

Think about it. We have theology and dogma and ritual and buildings and committees and church suppers and fund drives and second collections and ministry programs and religious education programs and and and. Do we have Holy Breath? Are we breathing? Is the church breathing? When Christians gather for worship or a meeting of any kind, whether a committee or a prayer meeting, can one smell the sweet aroma of Holy Breath?

The Holy Spirit doesn't bother to show up at most church meetings I attend. There is no Holy Breath. There is great deal of bloviating. To be "In the Spirit" is to be surrounded by the Breath of God. It is real. It is palpable and it is essential. If the Church doesn't breathe with the Breath of God, it is just going through a pointless exercise. Without the Breath of God, the Church is an "it" and not a "she." If a thing is not begun, conducted and ended by means of Holy Breath, it may be a fine event enjoyed by all, but it will

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change no lives and soon be forgotten. If you are not filled with the Breath of God, all your piety is an external exercise. You cannot reach Heaven and Heaven does not reach you, expect by the Breathing of God.

So I ask you, have you ever been filled with Holy Breath? If you haven't, ask the Breath of God to fill you. What have you got to lose?

Lord, breathe on us once again, as you did that first Easter Sunday night. Fill our sails with Holy Breath once again as you did on Pentecost so long ago!

So that's it. I'm done. Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal is very real and desperately needed. It's just that there isn't much of it out there.