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“THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS THE CHURCH
THROUGH CHARISMAS” (LG 12)

THE CONCILIAR DOCTRINE ON CHARISMA
AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE LAITY’S ACTIVE
INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Scholars generally agree that the Second Vatican Council’s teaching on charismata helps to conceive an active involvement of the faithful in the Church. Yet scholars disagree on the question how far the potential of the teaching has been realised. For example, in the 1980s, the French Dominican Yves Congar evaluated the conciliar teaching on charismata very positively, identifying charismata as one of the Council’s pneumatological “living seeds” that in the time following the Council “have yielded fruits”¹. In the same years, the Hungarian theologian Alexandre Ganoczy acknowledged the merit of the conciliar teaching on charismata yet not without reservations. He stated that it contains the theological foundation for a more active involvement of the laity in the Church but added that it needs a more precise articulation². More recently, reflecting on baptism as the new foundation of Catholic ecclesiology and ministry, the American theologian Richard Gaillardetz spoke in a similar manner. According to Gaillardetz, “the Second Vatican Council augmented its rich treatment of the common matrix of Christian baptism and discipleship with an uneven yet still significant use of the biblical notion of charism”³. The American Jesuit professor in religious ethics John

1. Y. CONGAR, *Actualité de la pneumatologie*, in J.S. MARTIN (ed.), *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, p. 16. Cf. the French: “Le deuxième concile du Vatican a commencé à nous rendre la dimension pneumatologique de l’Église Vatican II est resté comme en mi-chemin, mais il aensemencé l’Église de germes vivants, qui ont fructifié depuis. Nous pensons à la place reconnue aux charismes ...”.

2. A. GANOCZY, *Der Apostolat der Laien nach dem II. Vaticanum*, in E. KLINGER – R. ZERFASS (eds.), *Die Kirche der Laien: Eine Weichenstellung des Konzils*, Würzburg, Echter, 1987, 86-106, p. 95, cf. “[d]ie theologische Grundlage dazu [sc. shared responsibility] liegt allerdings schon in der Gestalt der konziliaren Charismenlehre vor, wenn sie auch noch der Präzisierung bedarf”.

3. R.R. GAILLARDETZ, *The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Community*, in S.K. WOOD (ed.), *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2003, 26-51, pp. 27-29.

Haughey was more outspoken in his critique of the conciliar teaching on charismas. In a reflection from 1999, he stated that “there is considerable uncertainty about exactly where ... charismas fit ecclesially”, and that “the ecclesiological implications [of charismas] are not pursued”⁴.

As claims like these usually lack elaboration, I will delve in this chapter into the conciliar teaching on charisma and explore both its promise and limitation for conceiving the laity’s active involvement in the Church.

I. CHARISMA AND CHARISMATICUS

The Council mentions *charisma* (in singular and plural) eleven times, and *charismaticus* (as adjective and noun) three times⁵. These fourteen references are spread over various documents, with a prominent proportion of six references in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, LG)*. Charismas are also mentioned in the *Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation (Dei Verbum, DV)* and in the Decrees on Mission (*Ad Gentes, AG*), on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem, AA*) and on the Life and Mission of the Priest (*Presbyterorum Ordinis, PO*)⁶.

Sometimes the documents make use of synonyms. For example, before speaking of charismas, *Lumen Gentium* 12 first states that

the same Holy Spirit not only sanctifies and guides the people of God by means of the sacraments and the ministries and adorns it with virtues, He also apportions his gifts “to each individually as He wills” (1 Cor 12,11), and among the faithful of every rank He distributes special graces⁷.

After specifying that these make the faithful ready to serve the upbuilding of the Kingdom, *Lumen Gentium* introduces the term *charismata*, thereby implying that these *dona* and *gratias speciales* function as synonyms for charismas⁸. Similarly, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 9 first speaks of *charismata* and then of the *dona Dei*.

4. J.C. HAUGHEY, *Charisms: An Ecclesiological Exploration*, in D. DONNELLY (ed.), *Retrieving Charisms for the Twenty-First Century*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1999, 1-16, p. 3. The book followed a symposium with the same title, held in 1996 in honor of Cardinal Suenens. Haughey shared with Suenens an interest in the charismatic renewal.

5. Cf. J.O. SANZ, *Index verborum cum documentis Concilii Vaticani Secundi*, Roma, Commentarium pro Religiosis, 1967, p. 71.

6. See LG 4, 7, 12, 25, 30, 50; AG 4, 23, 28; AA 3, 30; PO 4, 9; DV 8.

7. Quotes from the Council documents in English are based on the translation edited by Tanner, that I occasionally modify, see N. TANNER (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 1990, vol. 2, pp. 849-898.

8. See also AA 3, which is inspired by LG 12 and makes a similar movement, and LG 7, which first speaks of the *varia sua dona* and then about *charismaticos*.