

CONCERNING EXTRAORDINARY
PHENOMENA IN THE CONTEXT OF
SPIRITUAL OCCURRENCES

*Zu auffallenden körperlichen
Phänomenen im Zusammenhang mit
geistlichen Vorgängen*

THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION
Theologische Orientierung

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Concerning Extraordinary Phenomena in the Context of Spiritual Occurrences

Introduction

For a long time there has been a greater awareness of the body in spiritual experiences in the Charismatic Movement. In response to questions that have arisen regarding the so-called “Toronto Blessing”, the Theological Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Germany presents, together with the Coordinating Group, some thoughts that can assist in spiritual discernment. In the foreground there is not the Toronto Blessing, but the question how to deal with physical phenomena that accompany spiritual occurrences.

Encountering God is always a holistic event that includes the body and the soul; it is never something “purely spiritual”. This holds true for the Christian Liturgy as well as for the spiritual life of the individual. Certain positions of the body and ways of behaviour help a person to be open before God. Every new attention and affection given by God that touches man in his heart has a soul-body [*seelisch-leiblichen*] effect : knowledge relationship, strengthening and empowering feeling or spiritual “contact,” also always have a bodily component. At times it can be “felt to the fingertips”. This holds true in general for human experiences; sometimes we can read in a person's face what is going on inside of him.

Occurrences that remain in a conventional framework (what is “conventional” is sometimes very different in different cultures) provide no specific difficulties. However, today some are inclined to explain all spiritual proceedings as merely inner-psychological occurrences, thereby failing to take seriously enough the extent to which God communicates himself therein. The spiritual tradition, however, is well aware that the “Creator communicates to his creature”(¹) and that the human being, for instance in the Exercises, is able to distinguish this from his own thinking and wishes. The manner of such communications can certainly be very different. Ignatius distinguishes between being overwhelmed, being moved, and finally a quiet and more common way (for example in the midst of our own thoughts and decisions).(²) The first and the second way naturally have a stronger effect on the soul as well as the body (which is not to say that they are of greater worth). The Charismatic Movement in our century was allowed to experience the holistic effect of God's grace in a new way. The often surprising filling with the Holy Spirit (Baptism in the Holy Spirit) as well as many extraordinary charisms, which we were not accustomed to, underline the fact that the Spirit of God also encompasses the body. (³)

In this background stands the question how one is to judge the phenomena which have occurred since January 1994 under the name of the “Toronto Blessing.” When the Holy Spirit is prayed for, many people fall to the floor. Some start laughing or crying, sometimes even screaming, others shake or jerk, or feel as

¹ Ignatius of L., Spiritual Exercises, especially the “Annotations” (1-2Q) and the “Rules of Discernment.” 313-336. .

² Ibid., 175-189 “Three times to make a good choice.”

³ Here we are presupposing knowledge of the theological-pastoral orientation “Der Geist macht lebendig” (see literature below). Note that the aspect of bodily presence [*Leibhaftigkeit*] in an experience of the Spirit is a central theme throughout the document.

though they were drunk. It goes without saying that this abbreviated description does not fully capture or portray these occurrences. (⁴) However, before we can make a statement regarding these phenomena (part C) it is important to speak of bodily phenomena as accompanying manifestations of spiritual occurrences in principle (part A) as well as spiritual discernment (part B). We learn from history and our own spiritual experience and gain insight for the whole spiritual life as well as old-proven criteria to discern the new. Only after that will we ask the question whether in the “Toronto-phenomena” we are dealing with spiritual occurrences and how they can be judged from the criteria we have provided. This means that in parts A and B We do not speak of the “Toronto-event”, despite the fact that our questions have been raised through it.

I. Principles

A. Comparison With Occurrences in the Realm of Psychology and Medicine

It is often pointed out that phenomena like falling down, laughing, crying and shaking screaming and contortions also occur through the use of certain psychological methods. Does it follow that through prayer the same happens? Indeed, it must be admitted that with certain psychological therapies we encounter similar phenomena, hence a comparison is quite possible.

However there is a difference in that a therapy seeks to methodically uncover psychological problems and in the process causes such reactions. Whereas in prayer, it is God who is the explicit vis-a-vis. Since in the encounter with God the person as a whole is addressed holistically in a still greater depth, it is not surprising that the person is thereby deeply moved or stirred. This could result in a temporary inability to move, coming from a great astonishment and deep inner movement. It could also be a crying, as when the Lord touches a deep wound, or even a deep spiritual letting-go, that expresses itself through trembling and jerking. Many people know the beginnings of these experiences from their own personal prayer life.

Another even greater difference lies in the fact that often an inner movement is caused through the prayer of someone else, even though his or her special personal situation has not been spoken of. Such “surprises of the Holy Spirit,” which are always centered in a relationship to God in Jesus Christ, are something different than therapy, though we also gratefully accept therapy out of the hand of the Creator. Thus, even though the phenomena are the same or similar, their context and the direction in which they tend is different. Subsequently, of course, the spiritual “breakthroughs” have to be reflected pastorally, theologically, and psychologically, and integrated into a longer process. Such individuals therefore need good spiritual direction. Thus we see the necessity of well-led spiritual groups (for example groups of a charismatic character), and brotherly, pastoral help in the faith.

It is therefore to be noted that in both dimensions of the human being, comparable psychological processes begin which have their own “natural” intrinsic laws. They should be viewed as a talent and endowment given to the human person with creation. One could say that a “program” of ordinary and extraordinary patterns of experiences with a partly “ecstatic” character belongs to the natural workings of the human psyche. This program can appear and be activated, so to speak “retrieved” in different contexts.

In order to judge concretely bodily phenomena, we must ask the following questions :

Through what are they caused ? Do they appear in the context of psychotherapy, church service, or a private, personal relationship to God ? (This does not yet answer the question whether or not graced elements are also at work, despite the religious framework ; see A 3).

What happens on the human and on the psychological level ? Which levels in the human being are addressed ? Which natural intrinsic laws are coming into play ?

⁴ For more on this see Part C and the recommended literature given at the end.

What happens to the individual ? Do the occurrences have a positive effect on one's human or spiritual maturity, or do they rather cause harm ?

The testing must always consider both general and concrete-individual points of view. The general perspective offers an (open) framework, whereas the individual perspective protects the person in his or her own uniqueness.

Whether extraordinary phenomena appear in private prayer or in the public of church services, the decisive question is : Do they serve the glory of God and man's salvation ? Do they bring health to the person ? Or is the glory of God diminished, and is it harmful for man ? One can thereby indirectly recognize divine causality. Phenomena which are questionable or harmful in themselves cannot be traced back to God. We need to remain aware of the fact that in the spiritual domain the contrast between good and bad, between truth and deception is sharper than in things of everyday life or in therapy. This is not to rule out the authenticity of something that occurs in a form that we are not accustomed to.

B. Examination in Religious History

It is frequently noted that similar "ecstatic" phenomena occur in other "pagan" religions, for example in Shamanism. One might ask whether or not these parallels are suspicious. But what is meant by "ecstatic" in each case ? Are the phenomena really the same in the Christian realm ? In what way is it legitimate to speak of similarities?

The Creator of heaven and earth is the God of all mankind. He also draws those people to himself who still do not know him as the triune God (Acts 17:27). The forms of religious expression of different religions and cultures can be similar, such as the religious reverence of Hindus and Muslims. Yet there is a difference according to the image of God that people have. For instance, how strongly is their image of God distorted by fear? It is clear that both genuine piety and false forms exist everywhere. In principle it is certainly legitimate to foster an inner disposition through outward behaviour, such as through songs and liturgical services. The question of genuineness in this realm is largely a question of appropriateness.

In more intense occurrences there is a greater danger of working oneself up to something than would otherwise be the case. However, genuine religious experience is always a gift to the human being. Whenever he attempts to "make" it, he either reaches for emptiness or deceives himself. In the "ecstatic" cults such as the ones of the Shamans, ecstasies are produced through outer practices, or the deity is manipulated for some purpose. Or one could think of the Baal priests in 1 Kings 18:25-29. A Christian prayer of blessing should be far from that. One therefore has to test each concrete occurrence in light of the following question: does one work oneself up to something through certain techniques or a fixated attitude of anticipation, or is the attitude of a receiving faith the measure.

It is intrinsic to genuine religious experience that a person is thereby led "beyond himself (herself)." Here there is a certain similarity between the religions. Differences, such as those between Judeo-Christian prophecy and pagan prophecy, can therefore only be shown in light of the whole of the faith. The impression, for example, that many people have of Christian "ecstasy" shows a total ignorance of the actual proceedings. They confuse it with trance or some other experience in which freedom is diminished. A difference between the Old Testament prophets and their surrounding environment, in which similar phenomenon were known, consists precisely in the fact that the prophets of Israel do not use any kind of technique to bring about a trance. The "being-drawn" into God's presence opens up the greatest freedom (2 Cor 12:2-10). Whether this happened "in the body or outside of the body" are for Paul accompanying phenomena of little importance. It is to be noted that apparent similarities in external phenomena do not speak as such for or against the authenticity of an occurrence. What standard does the Christian have to judge by ? Does the question, often posed, whether something is godly or human or demonic get to the heart of the matter?

C. Principles of Theology and Religious Psychology.

Every genuine spiritual process in the human person has a divine and a human component. When God gives someone a sign of his attention and affection (grace), it is always received "according to the manner of the receiver." As soon as God's love takes hold of a person and begins to give form (becoming present in one's consciousness), a process has already begun in which the human being-consciously or unconsciously-participates (for example in a prophecy). In this sense, all spiritual experiences are psychological (the conversion of Paul ; Acts 9), many socially influenced, (the receiving of the Spirit by Cornelius; Acts 10), and depending on the case also "mediated" symbolically-sacramentally (the receiving of the Spirit in Ephesus, Acts 19:6).

In its origin however, grace, as the "self-communication" of God is given directly by God. In the end it comes from God im-mediately, or it is not "grace" at all, even if in its concrete form it is always at the same time human. It is not thereby correct to split up an occurrence according to percentages such as "fifty-fifty," or 80% human and 20% divine. or how it is often said partly "natural" partly "supernatural." Rather a mature spiritual occurrence is always at the same time wholly human and wholly divine, because the divine penetrates the human.

God's grace, however, always meets an unredeemed man. So in principle, the reactions of a person are to be distinguished from "God's actions." Until these have fully developed their helping, healing, and sanctifying effects, the human person can -often unconsciously- mix very much of his own into it. The best way to protect oneself from this is the striving for a pure, simple heart.

When dealing with human as well as "divine" powers, in the natural as well as in the "supernatural realm", - or let us say in the order of creation as well as in the order of redemption -the fundamental distinction is between good and evil. For praxis therefore, it is not crucial to establish the border between nature and grace (who could establish this border in the concrete anyway ?) or between the creative and redemptive action of God. Rather one must ask : Is this according to God's ways and does it correspond to his will ? (When the distinction between human and divine is made, many take "human" to mean the still unredeemed nature.)

The distinction always amounts to: Where in the end do the driving forces of an occurrence lie, so to speak the "basic impulse". The usual question whether something is human, divine. or demonic gives the impression that the discernment process could place these options side by side in a fashion of "either or". But the human person in his freedom does not stand before three values. The central question is : Is something according to God's way (= good) or not?

In many situations in everyday life this process of discernment works almost unconsciously, each situation according to the fundamental option of the human person. But. now and again it becomes conscious, and sometimes, in hours of grace or temptation, we know we are called to a decision : Should I (may I) follow this impulse or not ? In principle, nothing different occurs on such occasions than in the "ordinary" situations of life ; it is only that the structures become more evident. We could also speak of ordinary and extraordinary graces, which we are used to distinguishing as "very remarkable or more simple and widely diffused"" (LG 12) charisms.

In our inquiry we are interested in the "extraordinary" effects that are ascribed to God. The decisive question is not : How much is divine, how much is human ?, but: Can we discern where the basic impulse comes from, which means the primary impetus ? In answering this question the first step is : Can I discern out of the direct effects (way and manner, direction, fruits) whether it is good or evil, whether it is caused by positive and healing forces (lying within creation) or destructive forces (coming out of sinful existence) that arise or are released in the human being.

But there also is evil. On the one hand, the effects of evil can also appear stronger in "extraordinary effects," on the other hand they are more hidden in "fallen nature" and the temptations of "everyday life." An

“extraordinary (basic) impulse” can also come from the evil one, who at times appears disguised as an “angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14). Hence the frequent exhortation to stay awake and give resistance (see Lk 12: 37; 1 Cor 16:13; 1 Pet 3,5,8f etc.). Just as the grace of God cannot be directly “grasped,” neither can the negative influence be directly grasped, but it always appears to us interwoven with human values. Like a parasite, the evil one accompanies created occurrences (“obsesses” them).

An evil influence can also show itself when a genuine basic impulse is not used in a good way by the human person. Such a "misuse" of the good gifts of God occurs when dealing with the gifts of creation as well as with the gifts of salvation. It usually has a greater affect in the spiritual realm and, in the long run, presents more of a danger there.

D. The Perspective of Salvation History - Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church

The biblical foundation is important. As Catholics we do take into account that “the Spirit who leads us into all truth,” in his sovereignty reveals and does things, depending on the situation, that are not recorded in exactly this way in Sacred Scripture. However, his working is always in accordance with the testimony of Scripture and never contrary to it. There may well be biblical indications for many bodily accompanying manifestations that we encounter in the history of piety. Yet there are no indications of the kind of collective manifestation now underway. It is true, there is a communal “being-grasped” by the Holy Spirit (Num 11:24-29; 1 Sam 10:5-10; Acts 2:4,31; 10:44), as well as an individual experience of the Holy Spirit through prayer (Acts 9:17; Gal 3:2,5)–and this also in community (Acts 8:17; 19:6). Yet more often joy, praise, together with communal speaking in tongues, proclamation, and prophecy, are named as effects. Whether there were other bodily phenomena in individuals or the community cannot be excluded a priori when going through the Old or New Testament (see Gen 32:22-33; Neh 8:9-12; Acts 4:31).

It is certainly important that Israel learns to separate itself clearly from the cult -practices (trance) of the surrounding peoples. The prophetic excitement of the seventy elders is something totally different than the man-made, hyped up exuberance of the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:25-29). While phenomena, such as dances, may at times appear similar (2 Sam 6:5), there is a fundamental difference in terms of what “grips” or “enthuses” a person.

Moreover, a glance at church history is helpful. Single phenomena are known in the lives of exemplary Christians, and there are similar communal phenomena, for instance in modern times at the beginning of some charismatic movements in Reformed Christianity.^(5) However, they always faded after some time, and -in contrast to today's practices- were never consciously sought after and asked for in prayer. If one looks at the long term effects of those movements and also at the learning process (that is, how these people dealt with these phenomena), one certainly cannot say that all influences of this kind were from “below”. Perhaps the necessary maturity was lacking in some of the individuals who participated, however many were **occurrences indeed** accompanying manifestations of a new breakthrough of the Spirit. ^(6)

⁵ See for example Görres, Vol 11 p. 73.213-240. - John Wesley and the Methodists; Tersteegen (Föllner 372-384; 395 ff. 29 f.); Pentecostal Movement.

⁶ In this context the Kasseler Vorgänge of 1909 are often referred to. Was there something similar happening as is now underway in Toronto? To what origin are the tumults at the end of that time of mission traced back? For this see besides Giese, p. 49-197, the excellent thesis [Vikariatsarbeit] by Helmut Venzke (Smeelwai 15, 25980 Westerland, also available through CE.sekretariat Karlsruhe): "Darstellung und Bewertung der Kasseler Erweckungsbewegung 1907" (with documentation). One has the impression that the impulse of the two “Norwegians” was thoroughly Pentecostal. But after some time someone speaking in tongues started talking (teacher Ide). As the assembly went on he became more and more questionable. And forced the assembly into a form of repentance that appeared to be unhealthy (up to a public exposure). There was a “pius.” but unhealthy spirit of repentance which led to exaggerations. He had an easy play because the assembly was very serious about repentance. The problem is not the fact that this “tongue-speaker” “snorted with a grim face” before he started speaking in tongues (a “manifestation” so to speak) but that his basic tendency (which was rejected by the Norwegians!) was false. Such “directive prophecy” is now sufficiently known, but it is not always easy to recognise it and reject it. The leader H. Dallmeyer did by to limit it, but he did not recognise the false basic tendency. Moreover he did not let himself be tested concerning the evening “prophecy” by Engelhard Achenbach (Giese 72 f.; Venzke 42ff), who at first was “lying on the floor and giving

Finally, in the Charismatic Movement itself, there has been for some time, in addition to the charisms, occasional bodily manifestations in spiritual experiences, such as deep crying and shaking, a surprising and liberating laughter, sensations like drunkenness, inability to move, liveliness or power. Some fell over and sensed that they should remain before God lying on the floor, others learned to pray before God lying down. This usually happened in a private realm, in a small circle of people where trust in each other had grown through common prayer, or in the outskirts of bigger church services. Only now and then resting in the Spirit appeared in a greater measure in which many people fell to the floor when individually prayed over.

It is important for the present situation to think again about the mystery of God's freedom in distributing his graces and his principle of election. One of the greatest dangers of Pentecostal Charismatic "teaching" is the generalisation of concrete or individual experiences of grace. The specific attention and affection given by God and experienced by some individuals is declared to be "available" to all. But no human person can "pass on" the Spirit; he can only personally ask the Lord of the Spirit to send his Spirit each time anew. It would be a fundamental theological error to declare the *manner* of an experience of the Spirit, as given to us today in the Charismatic Renewal, to be a universal vocation. Similarly, in view of the phenomena that we are talking about here, one may not give the impression, in either teaching or practice, that this is the way "today" through which the Holy Spirit wants to work in everybody (see the teaching on the charisms). Each has his or her own vocation. But do we expect a real intervention of God even today, and are we personally open to it? Only then can we enter into this process of discernment in order to sift the chaff from the wheat.

II. Spiritual Discernment

A. Basic Impulse and Accompanying Phenomena

Our questioning comes to a focus in the distinction between genuine and false. We do not ask yet whether the "Toronto Blessing" generally is genuine or false, but rather how an individual and the community is able to judge extraordinary "effects" and how they should deal with them.

There is a way from the inside to the outside, and a way from the outside to the inside. If, as a result of an intense inner encounter with God, a person experiences a physical inability to move (to the point that he appears almost "dead"), a bodily lightness (to the point of levitation = rising above [the ground](#)), a deep inner pain (perhaps with deep crying), or an intense sensation of God's presence (to the point of a strong feeling of happiness), then the person is gripped with all the fibers of his attention by God. He is, so to speak, in the center of his person "totally with God" and perceives these "effects" only insofar as they become present in the fringes of his consciousness.

If the divine touching comes more from the outside, so that a person first sees or hears something and is then "thrown" to the floor or something similar (as it was probably the case with the conversion of Paul), then these phenomena always aim at "striking" one's inner being and prepare for an encounter with God there (cf. also 1 Kings 19).

In both cases man is addressed in his personhood. He is therefore wide awake on the inside (prophets) and experiences great freedom in his relationship to God, even though, for example, the outer ability to move may be temporarily limited. At the heart of the human being there is then in any case a clear recognition of God, and

the impression of having cramps or similar fits." This shows exactly that a bodily "manifestation" by itself is not yet an indication of the working of the Holy Spirit. What is decisive is the context and spiritual quality. Basically, the whole debacle was a problem of leadership, despite the good beginnings. In any case the rejection of the entire Pentecostal movement (Baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues, and prophecy - these were the problems, not the falling-over !), overshot the mark by far. The Mülheimers themselves differentiated and thereby retained the good core. The biggest mistake consisted in the general rejection by the "Berliner Erklärung."

he senses the possibility of a deep yes to him. Whether coming from within or without : the phenomena themselves have to be seen as "accompanying manifestations." In the first case mentioned, through a movement from the inside to the outside, the human person should --without blocking these phenomena-- focus all his attention on God and the true content of this encounter, thus allowing marginal phenomena to remain secondary. This means one should neither fight them, nor pay any particular attention to them, nor attempt to force them. They will then fade away after some time. On the other hand, if the phenomena come more from the outside, the person has to pay attention to the direction and the aim of this experience. If it is genuine, they will lead him to an encounter with God. The phenomena are "thrust through." so to speak. We are always dealing with something "surprising" to the human person.

God's communications are always partial-impulses ; they are therefore always ordered to other effects of his Spirit. It is quite possible that one impulse seems to be in opposition to another even though both come from God. A classic example is provided by Paul in 1 Cor 14. In serving the community many have received a prophesy or the gift of tongues, and yet only some get a chance to speak. "The spirit of prophets is subject to prophets" means that the individual impulses of the Spirit are given over to human freedom. With this nothing divine is subordinated to the human, but rather the one impulse of the Spirit is put in relation to another. The human person is responsible for discerning which impulse is to be preferred : the inner urge to give a prophecy, or the insight (which is caused by the same Spirit) into what is appropriate here and now and what serves the peace (shalom) and the up-building. That does not mean that the Holy Spirit is quenched or hindered. but that as a result of our human limitation and immaturity, the one partial-impulse corrects the deficiency of our response to the other spiritual impulse. In other words : it may very well be proper for a person to withdraw from the midst of this spiritual experience (in the opposite direction).

A third element we take from the "rules of discernment" (⁷): whoever receives a consolation from God, "should be alerted to the fact that there is an important difference between the time of this consolation itself and the time which immediately follows it. We may still be in a state of fervour and still feel some after-effects of a divine favour just received." Ignatius of Loyola subsequently speaks of "different resolutions and intentions" that one forms in this "second period" or phase which are not like that basic impulse "given directly by God our Lord". This applies as well to our question. Many "effects" do not come in the same way "directly" from God like the core of an actual grace. They are codetermined by our own additions or "through a good or bad spirit", and therefore have to be carefully tested. In other words they do not have the same "immediacy" as the basic impulse.

B. Discernment Process in the Individual

If an individual is surprised by such accompanying phenomena in his personal life, he must first determine whether the basic impulse out of which they flow and the central point **to which they aim at is good**. (⁸) An important criteria is that through grace a person will find himself enabled from within to use his freedom, whereas a temptation oppresses him or triggers a strange undertow ("fascination"). if the impulse is a positive one, the person will treat the phenomena described above as accompanying phenomena.

Each spiritual impulse also takes hold of the psyche of the person and begins processes that have to be considered according to the principles of psychological development. This is the normal work of integration. The healing, "integrating" power flows from the spiritual impulse, which may not be judged only according to psychological laws (especially not by a psychology that does not reckon with the workings of the Spirit of God and which does not acknowledge different levels). In everyday life, each Christian must learn to be

⁷ Ignatius of L., *Spiritual Exercises* 336; here, with commentary according to Baumert, *Dem Geist Jesu folgen* p.86f.

⁸ This often cannot be recognized from the first impression. It belongs to a mature Christian to make such distinctions. Here the *gift* of discernment is needed, which must be asked for from God. Also needed is experience and training on how to properly deal with this gift. The following are helpful : "Der Geist macht lebendig" IV – in Engl. : "The Spirit gives Life" (s.Lit.). _ Ignatius of L.. *Spiritual Exercises*, 312.336: Rules for Discernment. - See also texts in: Baumert, *Dem Geist Jesu folgen*, 45_94 (with explanations). Very concrete for our questions: Görres, vol II 320--324: "Kriterien zur Unterscheidung von echter und falscher Mystik."

responsible and pay attention to this difference. Otherwise one will confuse these levels and think something to be spiritual which actually is not, or disregard the psychic principles in an integration of spiritual impulses.

In a strong sensory perception ("sensatio") a (spiritually immature) person will tend to pay attention to these phenomena, to dwell on them and may want to keep them, reinforce them, or repeat them. A person should rather let these phenomena fade away and reassure him/herself that they did indeed originate from a good source. For as soon as they are held onto or even "made by human efforts", it is no longer the same source. Unnoticed, the phenomena themselves change as a consequence. The experience loses some of its inner depth, becomes shallow, and fades out after some time into irrelevance. Even more dangerous is the possibility of the phenomena pulling one into an undertow. If a person is strongly oriented toward experience and is not willing to let go of the phenomena, it is possible that he will work himself up to the point of hysteria-like excesses.

It is therefore quite possible to waste a gift of the Spirit through misuse and finally end up in the contrary (Gal3:4). The way of spiritual experience therefore needs a great measure of vigilance ; it is like a ridge walk. We will "seek the face of the Lord," whether or not certain "phenomena" occur in the process. . Single-mindedly we will go on our way, thankfully accepting the help of spiritual experience. At the same time we will go on faithfully even when the phenomena do not appear, or appear differently than had been hoped for. When spiritual phenomena are "sought" for their own sake and accompanying phenomena are desired as an end in themselves, the proper order of things is reversed. Through such a misuse one commits a graver wrongdoing than if one were to misuse the gifts of creation. Thus each has to seriously test him/herself before God.

It could also be the case that the basic impulse is not spiritual and does not come from a relationship to God but stems primarily from psychological patterns. It could be triggered for instance by a step in the development of personality, or by therapeutic treatment. The question of authenticity must therefore be : Is the occurrence, in the manner in which it occurs, healthy and does it contribute to the healing process or not?(9) Therefore the criteria of a good human science are important. From this perspective, one can then decide whether something is morally good or bad. Concerning the bodily phenomena, the principle also applies here that they are a passage to a mature personality. Likewise here, a clutching after such experiences ("sensations") reflects immaturity or even sickness.

A basic impulse can also be a temptation of the evil one. Something can appear to be holy without actually being good ; for instance exaggerations, or self-willed, stubborn, and one-sided piety. Ignatius of Loyola distances himself from such (seemingly spiritual) "consolations" as soon as he realises that they hinder him from doing what he recognises as the will of God, scil. studying. Finally there are extraordinary attacks of the evil one. For a long period of time Ignatius saw "in the middle of the day something in the air close to himself. It gave him great consolation, because it was extraordinarily beautiful to look at. And the more often he saw it, the greater his inner consolations became." But after a deeper encounter with God, he [recognised its true origin](#) and rejected it with determination even though it "happened again" .(10)

Extraordinary bodily phenomena can also come from the evil one. Of Gerhard Tersteegen it is known that, "After having had contacts with the inspirations and movements of certain people, he was attacked by foreign spirits and effects. When he went from his work to pray in quietness, his body was so enraptured in

⁹ This is not an attempt to separate after all human and divine; the orders of creation and salvation. It goes without saying that all the activities of human life are always related to grace: however regarding a conscious activity, the human being is able to distinguish what is in the foreground in each case: Is this activity an answer to the call of grace or an independent use of natural law. To "find God in all things" means that both go together in the ideal case, but not that both are identical, as if the grace of God would eliminate the laws of nature" or that the laws of nature would make the grace of God superfluous.

¹⁰ Ignatius of Loyola. Report of the Pilgrim, 19-35 and 54 f.; cf. Baumert, Dem Geist Jesu folgen, p. 76 f.

movement that all his body parts shook. Tersteegen who intimately knew God in his gentle and blissful being, did not pay heed to these strange and frightening effects, but went back to his work. After he had responded to these manifestations in this way a number of times, the shaking stopped and the temptation came to an end."¹¹) Notice, the shaking starting when he "went to pray," and Tersteegen responded by "going back to his work," thus avoiding the occasion where this shaking had begun. He saw a temptation in this, and he knew then that the proper way for him to worship God at this moment consisted in working. Whereas, it was during prayer that he seemed to be exposed to these "strange effects." Thus, through conducting himself in this manner the temptations soon ended and he could return to prayer without being disturbed.

It does not follow that we should avoid God, rather we should test where and how we should serve him depending upon our circumstances. We can thus avoid a pseudo-piety or even worse things. It is to be noted : "pious" temptations often follow upon an experience of grace, at times imitating grace. They are often encountered on the way of a determined following of Jesus. With bodily effects one must also take note whether the body-symbolic is correct.¹²) Moreover, perceptions that *start out* on the periphery (like Tersteegen's shaking) are to be viewed with suspicion. As soon as a temptation is recognised as such, there is only one thing to do : clearly resist it. After one has recognised the temptation, every playing with it is sin and gradually leads to a spiritual destruction.

One cannot avoid the burden of discernment by, for example, rejecting everything extraordinary. Many are surprised by such effects, and for them a total rejection is not possible. By rejecting everything extraordinary they would moreover "quench" the genuine effects of the Spirit. To limit the actions of God to what is expected and "ordinary" is contrary to a total surrender to God which has to leave the law of acting up to him.

The parallel to therapeutic, pathological, or even occult phenomena merely reveals that in each case powers come into play that go beyond our everyday horizon of experience, be they unconscious, paranormal, or even para-psychological energies. In each genuine charism, powers of creation are also activated (in this case by God). The decisive difference is as follows : Does the Holy Spirit himself direct their use, or is the human person, in his sub-conscious, the driving force, or does a counter-divine force take hold of them--not without the human person allowing them entrance.

The solution does not lie in closing oneself to everything "uncontrollable" ; the human person should rather open himself always anew to the Holy Spirit and learn to correctly use the gifts that come from him. We need not be afraid to travel this road. Whoever opens himself honestly to the activity of the Holy Spirit may trust that God will give him/her the necessary help to be able to discern the things that concern him. The difficulties inherent in this process of discernment are part of the burden that comes with the following of Christ.

Some examples will help clarify this point. In a loud laughing, crying, jerking, or screaming there might be a greater danger that psychological occurrences will take on a life of their own (which means they are no longer tied to the spiritual center). The same thing, however, can happen in a resting or a quiet smile. The crucial point is when receiving turns into "grasping," and occurrences take on a life of their own, sometimes even creating an undertow. At times this cannot be discerned right away--at least not from the outside.

¹¹ Cited in: O. Föller, p. 379. - For our purposes the entire concluding chapter "Anfragen und Anstösse," p. 364-388, is extremely helpful.

¹² It is suspicious if the center of attention of an (apparently) spiritual occurrence such as in prayer, lies below the region of the heart, for example in sexual sensations. As accompanying manifestations they should fade away. For more on this see : Baumert, *Dem Geist Jesu folgen*, 81-81.

A person may be deeply touched by the Spirit of God and start jerking. His efforts must be to integrate this in such a way that he does not allow his attention to focus on the twitching. He should all the more clearly align himself to the Lord, so that these phenomena always remain accompanying manifestations. If they do not fade away by themselves, he will ask God that they cease, instead of working himself up to them. It would then be correct to switch to forms of prayer in which they are less likely to appear.

However, if such phenomena endure for a longer period of time, [the suspicion of a malformation or deception](#) cannot be excluded. Perhaps they were originally genuine accompanying phenomena ; but now they are unconsciously associated with prayer and suddenly appear again in prayer or perhaps take on a life of their own independently of prayer. Bruce Yocum recounts that before his first prophecy he breathed very heavily and could only speak with panting and groaning. Long after he had been accepted as prophet in the community, someone drew his attention to this, "Why do you breath in such a strange way before every prophecy?" He realised that basically he had been repeating that first situation again and again. He could easily refrain from this noise now.

If a jerking starts suddenly, if it overcomes the person more from the outside, so to speak. one should examine very closely whether a temptation starts developing here (imitation?). Someone may be susceptible to this temptation because he had experienced the phenomenon initially in a good context. He does not resist it because he thinks that it is a sign of the Holy Spirit, or that a rejection would put the encounter with God (during which he had experienced the phenomenon for the first time) into question. But both are not identical. Whoever looks closer will notice that the phenomenon, for example the jerking, does not come from the same depth that it originally came from, but has now taken on a life of its own. This is a temptation which one has to clearly resist. This applies especially when one's daily activities and duties are disrupted (as we see with Ignatius, Tersteegen, see above). Whoever distances himself from such a temptation will soon realise that he becomes clear and simple again (as if liberated). Whereas these phenomena place him gradually in a murky or hectic mood. If one can separate oneself from this expression only with difficulty, the danger of a spiritually addictive behaviour is even more apparent.

Through this one thing is clear : what is decisive on this spiritual road is the sincerity of intention, the "purity of heart." Does the **human** person really seek God, or does he seek the phenomena ? On this spiritual road, whoever seeks the gifts without the Giver finally ends with the phenomena taking on a life of their own and drifting off. The human person hears responsibility for this on all levels of human activity. Should an impulse turn out to be a temptation --maybe only after some time-- the human person has to resist it. Even if someone has the conviction that an impulse is good, he still has to take all further steps in freedom and responsibility. Even if something "overcomes" him spontaneously he will, insofar as he is able, regain self-control. If he is overcome with laughter, he will try to regain control. If he falls to the floor, he will get up as soon as it is possible --insofar as this is fitting to the inner process. If he starts screaming, he will not work himself up to further screaming. This holds true in general for human life and also for (imaginary or genuine) spiritual experiences.

It is correct that in a self-surrender to God we give ourselves over to him. However, this does not mean that after an invocation of the Spirit one can let everything "run by itself" so to speak. The activity of the Spirit of God is always dialogical : it liberates the person for freedom and enables him to use --responsibly and in dependence on Him-- the gift that God has placed at his disposal. To this belongs also a consideration of time, place, and circumstance. In a trusting community one will therefore allow some effects which one would elsewhere avoid if possible. So one always has to answer the following two questions : Is a thing good in itself ? What is the appropriate place for it ?

C. Dealing With Bodily "Phenomena" in Community

Many examples of bodily accompanying phenomena recorded in the Bible and in Church history happened in private. One could therefore say that they do not belong in public. But it is not quite this easy. When Saul is grasped by a prophetic spirit during his encounter with the prophets (1 Sam 10:10; 19:20-24), this happens in community. Basically, most events have witnesses or at least are "publicised" through their incorporation

in Holy Scripture _ (e.g. Ex 3:34; 1 Kings 19:6). However it is correct to distinguish between the private realm, the familiar community, and the public realm of a church service.

Moreover, many examples in Holy Scripture show that the imparting of the Spirit and His effects can also occur through **human mediation** (1 Kings 19:19; Acts 8:17; 19:6) And the example of Saul shows that the Spirit sometimes passes over from one to the other (see also Num 11:26); that is if an event is not experienced in community from the beginning (Num 11:25; Acts 2: 4:31:10 etc.). The crucial point is : "effects" should never be mediated or suggested, rather the human person should receive *the Spirit*. This has various consequences. Not only are individuals grasped directly by God (Paul), it is also legitimate to pray publicly for the Spirit to be given to individuals (Acts 8:15ff, 19:6).

This prayer may not only bring about a hidden imparting of the Spirit, **but also cause perceptible effects** from the inside and outside to come forth ("become manifest"). Since the days of the apostles this has happened time and again and is now witnessed in great breadth in the Pentecostal Charismatic Movement of the twentieth century. (The Pentecostal danger on the other hand consists in the fact that they do not have an adequate appreciation of effects of the Spirit that remain without extraordinary characteristics). Quite often the following occurs: a conversion experience (which may include inner words or pictures), an immediate change of heart, the experience of God's presence, the filling with the Holy Spirit (Baptism in the Holy Spirit), growth in faith, hope, and love, a pain that eases, joy, rejoicing, charisms like speaking in tongues, and a prophecy. All these take hold of the human person as a whole .and (as with every spiritual experience) always includes a bodily component.

Here there is a certain distinction from classical "mysticism," e.g. as understood in the 16th century. These experiences occurred essentially in private prayer, and the individual would write or speak about the experience only afterwards. The "charismatic" experience, on the other hand, often happens in community. To be sure, the dimension of the personal unification with God, which happens in the private sphere and which could also be called "mystic," is not excluded. Yet it is virtually essential for charismatic experience and the exercise of the charisms that they occur within a certain public realm of the church. These experiences find their necessary corrective (and assistance in maturing) in the learning community of the church. The rest of the church has the duty to face this working of the Spirit, in order --in a process that may be painful-- to integrate these experiences and not to become guilty of pushing them away.

For our purposes, the following question comes into focus : is it right to pray publicly for people to receive the Spirit if one knows from experience that many will fall over, start laughing or crying, maybe even start screaming, shaking, or jerking in the process? Is it right to create the necessary outward conditions right from the outset by deliberately going to or clearing an open area, and raising a corresponding attitude of expectation through reports and testimonies? In general one can neither affirm nor negate these questions. One has to examine concretely in each case whether the occurrences are genuine in themselves. To what degree are they a spiritual help --as for example, in the liturgy and spiritual retreats? Where do elements of (mass) suggestion begin? A church service of great spiritual density can also lead to a spontaneous expression of inner movements and possibly even corresponding songs and dances. However, the question remains to what degree a genuine disposition is created through song, dance, and music. Or where do these elements begin to have a suggestive effect or turn into mass hysteria? Here a spiritual discernment in community, which naturally lives from the judgement of many individuals, is called for.

It is helpful to mark the corner points : there are without doubt moments where a praying community is touched by the Spirit so deeply that it breaks out spontaneously in praise and worship, expresses itself in unusual movements and Charisms of the Spirit may break open directly. Beside the classic biblical reports (Acts 2; 4:31;10) there are testimonies of the lives of saints (St. Francis), or the outpouring of the Spirit at Duquesne at the beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the USA in 1967. Moreover we should recall the beginnings of the Moravian Brethren, the origins of the Quakers (from "quake," tremble, shake),

and the awakenings of John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefields.^(13) of whom similar bodily phenomena are reported. However, as R. Hempelmann (37) correctly notes. these are “sporadic manifestations which are not strived for in the course of ritualised church services, nor praised and sought for as a regular experience of the Spirit”.

It is important to distinguish between the being surprised by the Holy Spirit and a communal attunement to such experiences. As with the individual, there is a danger that a community will work itself up, exaggerate, or attempt to repeat these experiences. Here the border between what is a gift and. what is "makeable" is overstepped This does not mean that the initial impulse was unspiritual, but it may be the case that the community has not dealt with it in the right way.

Beside the false handling of good gifts, there are extremes which dearly are not of the Spirit of God even though they appear in pious dress. They may have grown out of a good beginning, but what "has begun with the Spirit has ended with the flesh" (cf. Gal 3:3).^(14)

Therefore one has to clearly resist negative effects, but the question still remains, how should one react to exaggerations and misuses of good gifts. Would not the rejection of all of the extraordinary effects which appear in a community entail throwing out the baby with the bath water? This appears to be a simple handling of the matter, but such a simple decision [*Ent-scheidung*] prevents a necessary differentiation [*Unter-scheidung*]. Just as a general rejection of Baptism in the Spirit and extraordinary charisms would quench the Spirit, so too one must here concretely and specifically ask about the "beginning, middle, and end of an occurrence. " ^(15)

For a community this means to test very conscientiously whether or not it may arouse an attitude of expectation for such accompanying phenomena. Sensation seeking and craving for miracles must not divert one from the Giver of gifts. As with the individual so too in the community and the church there occurs growth in different phases. Different powers which complement and correct each other are brought together. Therefore, theological teaching and pastoral wisdom are imperative. For us Catholics, this also means integration into the sound teaching of the Church, in her community and authority, as well as integration in the spiritual experience of the centuries. Yet at the same time, we must maintain an openness to new activities and works of God, even if they should come to us "via the non-denominational churches."

III. C Concerning the Phenomena Associated With the Name 'Toronto Blessing'

Only now do we get to the specific questions that gave rise to our reflections. The awareness of a broad, historical, and systematic background should sharpen our perspective and allow us to understand today's events more clearly and assess them correctly,

¹³ For more on this see Patty Gallagher, Günter Kretz, O. Föller, Guy Chevreau etc., see bibliography below.

¹⁴ Such examples are, for instance, the Camisards that split off from the Huguenots or the jansenistic Konvulsionisten that derive from the Catholics. Some of the latter often were "violently shaken and suffered from twitching in the neck and in the speaking organs ; "were thrown to the floor as though dead," and dealt themselves and to each other strange tortures, enduring them patiently. Here it is clear that a "foreign spirit" reigns and forces come into play that are either sick, occult, or demonic. A relation to spiritualist occurrences is apparent, For more see Knox, 320-348, - Moreover Görres, vol III 377f; vol V 105; 132ff.

¹⁵ Ignatius, Spiritual exercises 333, cf. Baumert, Dem Geist Jesu folgen, p. 74

A. C 1. Short Description and Questions

Since the year 1993 in certain church services there have appeared bodily effects in a greater measure when the Holy Spirit is prayed for. This happened at first in Argentina and Africa, and since January 1994 continually in a non-denominational community of the "Vineyard Movement" in Toronto, Canada. From there this so called "Toronto Blessing" spread to many countries throughout the world. It is above all Christians of the Pentecostal Charismatic Movement of all denominations who have extended the "Toronto Blessing." Communities which are associated with, or close to, the Vineyard Movement took on a certain role of leadership in the beginning. An expectation of an immanent great awakening or a spiritual "refreshing" was partly associated with this.

The church services proceed as follows : praise and worship, testimony, and a proclamation oriented toward Scripture according to the manner of each denomination. The part in which the blessing is given starts with a short explanation of what happens, along with an explanation of what is essential or irrelevant. Then the chairs are put aside and a prayer-leader opens with a prayer for the Holy Spirit. Then the members of expressly commissioned prayer teams go to individuals and pray over them in a general way for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Many soon fall to the floor ; they are caught by people specifically designated for this job and then they rest. With some, there appear further bodily "phenomena" such as shaking, silent or loud crying or laughing, temporary sensations such as an inability to move, drunkenness, lightness, or strength. With some, there appears a strange jerking ; with others a loud screaming, roaring, or barking. Most of the time this fades out after a while. All those that can get up do so (at the latest) for the common prayer which concludes the service.

This is what one sees from the outside. What is decisive, of course, is the inner process, which naturally only comes to light afterwards through the testimonies of the individuals that took part. Many reports speak of radical developments within a conversion process, positive changes in life, and inner healing, especially in relationships to God and others --and these changes can be long-lasting. Occasionally one hears that someone who let himself get involved in this movement has felt negative effects in the following period. With the positive as well as negative reports one has to take into account the brief period of observation, It must also be observed [that certain expectations can also effect the ensuing experiences.](#)

What is unique to the "Toronto Blessing" are not the individual elements in themselves --most of these are not unfamiliar in charismatic circles-- but the fact that they simultaneously take hold of so many people present in large assemblies.. (We prescind here from a further discussion and point to the literature listed at the end.)

Such assemblies can strike outsiders as rather strange. Judgements are in part passionately controversial. The way and manner in which people report is also very different, especially as the reports are often tied to personal judgements. In addition to the interpretation given by the responsible leaders, there are also the theological, psychological, or ideological presuppositions of the persons concerned. All of this has to be taken into account in a proper categorising and evaluation.

A spiritual examination is only possible if the individuals judging do not approach the question with preconceived, fixed judgements, and are willing to get involved personally in the process of decision making. A mere judgement which comes from the outside can never do justice to a spiritual reality. In each concrete case a personal knowledge of an occurrence in all its dimensions (insofar as is possible) is necessary.

Some pose the question whether the phenomena we are here considering can be compared to phenomena we are familiar with in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement. Also, do they have a biblical basis? Are they of a spiritual nature at all, and if so, are they not totally new and different ? It is also asked whether one may start with the examination or testing of single phenomena, or whether everything has to be viewed as a "package" right from the outset --a package which can only be accepted or rejected as a whole. This cannot be decided from the outset, nor even within a short period of time, but only through gradually listening, praying, and testing.

Following upon these reflections we are able to pose the original question : Can one recognise, at first in the individual case, but also in processes of the community, where the chief point of an event lies. Is it in the spiritual or physical realm ? And correspondingly, are we able to speak concretely of a spiritual basic impulse or not ?

The question should be posed in the following manner : Are the occurrences such that we have the impression that the basic impulse comes from God or at least that the chief point of the event lies in the spiritual realm, or not (any longer)? And, how is this to be dealt with :

- a) with individual persons (2)
- b) in groups, communities, or parishes (3), and
- c) how are the occurrences to be interpreted (4) ?

The aim of this statement is not to judge in general everything that happens under the name "Toronto Blessing," be it positive or negative, but rather to apply and make more concrete some of the criteria of measurement that have been mentioned so that one can test each case.

B. C 2. Concerning the Experience of Individuals

- We are aware of the testimonies of many individual people, who in the realm of such blessings report of positive effects on their lives, --and not just for the moment. It follows that we cannot view the basic impulse in them as suspicious right from the outset. Much of what has happened in their lives through this event ties in with their following of Christ. and can be viewed as further steps along this path.

- In this context we should consider the splitting up into 20% spiritual, 70% natural, 10% demonic which is occasionally (for example in Toronto) expressed :

a) This could mean that the phenomena for the most part are not supernatural in the strict sense. This is probably correct. After what has been shown (see A 4 above), God's working through grace reaches much further than explicit "miracles." Whether and how far the grace of God is at work in an occurrence cannot be recognised by simply looking at the extraordinary character of the phenomena, but only through the criteria of spiritual discernment.

b) By this one could mean that in such gatherings in 70% of the people who experience these phenomena the spiritual center is missing, and that there are only psychological processes that take place. Then it would be irresponsible to continue such events because they would happen with false presuppositions and without the necessary competence. One may not interfere in the psyche of other people in the guise of piety. This would be religiously glossed over manipulation or mass suggestion.

c) This distinction may want to indicate that in a whole occurrence, for a great percentage (70%) natural psychic laws are at work, but it is the 20 % who trigger the event in the spiritual realm. This would come close to what we mean by the discernment between the basic impulse and human integration. This would also indicate that psychic autonomy is to be taken into account --of course though ordered to that spiritual center.

d) The distinction could also begin with the question to what degree the whole event and the individual phenomena are already formed by the given spiritual impulse, and how far they are not yet. consider, for example, a person who, though touched anew by the grace of God, is still determined very much by the "old" and stands only at the beginning of a process of transformation (therefore only 20 % spiritual).

e) The distinction could however also mean, that the motivation of a person remains not clearly enough determined by the basic impulse, so that the occurrences are spiritually "thinned" out and therefore drift off.

This of course would be dangerous because the direction is not longer correct. If behind this distinction stands the conviction that the phenomena are spiritually not integrated or concretely formed in a high percentage (70-80 %), then one can hardly speak of "blessing" which goes beyond the scope of everything previously encountered.

- Therefore each individual must learn to exercise his/her responsibility during such occurrences. Some think that everything must be left to run itself in order not to disturb the activity of the Holy Spirit. This opinion is often fostered by the fact that individuals who are praying for others tell them to be casual and not to pray. It is correct that one should be totally relaxed in front of God ! The preceding time of worship should precisely seek after such an openness to the Lord. My own actions should diminish in order to be totally receptive and attentive to him. Just as at the beginning there needs to be a conscious alignment with God, (not to be merely relaxed in a casual way ; this would exactly open the door wide to the marginal phenomena) so too in the course that follows. The Holy Spirit continually leads into freedom, and thereby also leads one to answer His touching in the right way and to order his impulses (cf. B-1 and 2).

- One (negative) example : During a Homily at a church service two young women started laughing again and again to the point where it became a distraction for others. After a team member spoke with them, they were able to calm down to some extent. However when the time came for the blessing, they soon fell to the ground and laughed so loud again and again that they again drew attention to themselves. They seemed to work each other up. and each further prayer of blessing seemed to intensify the laughing. During another evening it was similar; they writhed around on the floor, screamed "like lions" in a very awkward way for a long period of time, then giggled again, seeming to fire each other up. It was more like a spectacle.

- Caution is to be exercised when people come, often repeatedly, in order to let themselves be blessed without the necessary phase of digesting the respective events. Here a consumer attitude can easily develop, preventing authentic spiritual growth and drifting off into sensationalism. This applies especially when during a gathering the expected phenomena are placed in the foreground and not the spiritual event.

- All the persons that have this happen to them need a personal spiritual director or at least a suitable conversation partner.

- The danger is especially great when experiences of this sort are not integrated sufficiently into the life of a community/parish (such as through the arrival of new visitors who do not help form the life of this community). If the persons concerned are not elsewhere tied into a parish and receiving pastoral direction the necessity of both should be explicitly pointed out to them.

- A Christian has to know about the fact that "what begins with the Spirit may end with the flesh" and he therefore has to pay attention. step by step, to "where his heart is" (Gal 3:3; Lk 12:34). Because at each point the tempter can interfere, for instance by aping the good (see above A 3 and B 2).

- Specific dangers are those of a false "adaptation" to ones surrounding (imitation of others), thereby allowing oneself to be pulled into a (collective or individual) "undertow;" or abandoning oneself to the momentum of (possibly genuine) manifestations which now take on a life of their own. Above all, we must now recall the fact that one may not seek after an accompanying phenomena (see above B 2).

- Many parents are not aware that children can come to spiritual harm through the outbreaks and negative phenomena of individual participants (through shock experiences). Therefore it should be warned against taking them to such gatherings. One also has to take into consideration that while very young children understand what is going on, they can hardly digest it.

- So every individual must ask himself before God : whether he should go to such a gathering, whether this corresponds to his inner leadings (which means he must be careful to live under God's direction), and what his motives are. (Now one should again read A 3 and 4. as well as B 1 and 2) If one resists the temptation of

sensationalism and the grasping after effects (this means to accept the possibility that "nothing" may occur) and opens oneself to God in a pure attitude, then one may --so long as there is confidence in a community or parish-- without fear ask for the Spirit of God without setting limits to the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:11-13). Ultimately communal church services live by the decisions of many individuals.

C. C 3. Communities and Parishes

What applies to the individual must be applied correspondingly to a parish or congregation. Because there can be a false dealing with good experiences, be it through exaggeration, human activism, or impure motivation, and because moreover "deceptions" are possible, one cannot definitely approve as a whole everything which runs under the heading "'Toronto Blessing.'"

- It is therefore necessary not to speak in general about the "'Toronto Blessing'" as a "package," but to differentiate respectively. Some similar events in communities and groups are even independent of "'Toronto'" or stand at most in a very loose connection with "'Toronto'" (¹⁶). In any case, we are dealing with the authentic surrender of individuals to God and with his working in them.

- If at different places and in different contexts similar phenomena appear which here and there are dealt with in an inappropriate way, we are not legitimised to suspect from the outset all such experiences.

- If, however, one connects with "Toronto Blessing" only a certain outward context (because apparently such effects are triggered through prayer for the most part by people who have been in Toronto) as well as a certain type of church service and the manner of asking for the Holy Spirit and responding to "phenomena" that appear thereby, this label may have a certain validity. But this is to say nothing as yet about the authenticity of the experiences that individuals have. Likewise the different church services are to be distinguished. The fundamental principle "all or nothing," would in any case not be reasonable.

- One could distinguish between "normal" charismatic phenomena (such as we are now accustomed to) and "extreme" manifestations (laughing, violent screams, twitching, etc.). The problem is not to be solved by allowing the first and rejecting the second. That would be to cast suspicion on the second right from the outset. Moreover, there is often a free-flowing transition from one to the other. Yet with the latter an even greater vigilance is required; not only because they are new, but also because of a greater endangering (cf. B 2 and C 2). The criteria for both is : authentic or false! That means, for example with screams : do they lead to liberation and release, or do they work up to hysteria, or are they possibly demonic.

- One could pose the question whether there should be open church services that are characterised by the expectation of extraordinary bodily manifestations. This would not be a rejection of such appearances in principle, but rather a question of pastoral prudence and a listening to the current leading by God. Just as the individual should not "seek" accompanying phenomena, so the community should not "seek" them! There needs to be a good spiritual discernment in order to recognise whether the spiritual atmosphere that develops through communal church service is directed to the worship of God and His actions, or whether the human level of communication stands in the foreground. In other words : where do we have mutual spiritual help, and where does the danger of human "transfer" or suggestive elements begin ?

- The form of prayer, "more, more," may be intended in a genuine way, but easily takes on the character of magic; likewise with fanning and blowing. Here the general rules and the necessity of spiritual sobriety apply, for, as we know, each prayer can become a routine. Why not the form of "please"?

¹⁶ The fact, for example, that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal spread and formed from Duquesne does not

mean that all graces of the renewal would be a "Duquesne-Blessing" (as a sort of "package").

- It seems less doubtful when such phenomena turn up "by themselves" without someone expecting them, even detached of such blessings and more at the fringes of the (usual) church services (even though they are to be closely tested also here).

- However, if the leadership of a community is convinced they should invite people to come to blessings of this kind in a private framework, then they have to know about the natural workings of the spirit. They must be willing to learn these step by step. They must especially be in the position to give the necessary attention to the individual visitors.

- Do we then really have a working of the Holy Spirit ? It cannot be excluded right from the outset that God gives to communities today, in a new and greater measure, what so far was witnessed more on an isolated individual basis. There are many who assume that this is the case with the phenomena that are associated with the "Toronto Blessing." However there are also many who have [considerable doubts --at least in view of the whole "package."](#)

- On the other hand, we have experienced similar things in the last years with the outbreak of so many unusual charisms. It must be taken into account, that new graces, because of their unfamiliarity, appear to be more extraordinary at the beginning and are often given in a greater measure at the beginning, but recede after some time and integrate themselves. Only then do they get their lasting place in the praxis of church piety. The knowledge that manifestations by the Spirit are not at one's disposal must prevent leaders from putting something on display or forcing it. Especially those who see a genuine core in this must be conscious of the danger of misuse and distortion.

- In conducting these services the basic attitude must be humility. This means : no self-confidence on the basis of new experiences (a gift has to be treated as a gift); the willingness to listen to theological and spiritual inquiries; and finally, no arrogance toward other Christian churches, denominations, and traditions.

- When one looks at the Bible, one will guard oneself against over-simplifications (for example, to view isolated cases of many centuries now as something that is normal, but just more concentrated), and be open to good church theology (cf. A 4 and B 3).

- Finally the leaders have to avoid all suggestive elements in word and in deed (also in brochures). Here especially, there is a great danger of imitation and mass hysteria. The participants also have a duty to point this out to the leaders if they sense that something like this is going on. For the whole community, together with the leaders, is responsible for spiritual discernment. Everybody should also apply the above criteria and judge for himself according to these criteria, thereby contributing to the general decision making process.

- The possible dangers became abruptly evident in the following shocking "warning." Someone confessed that, "after half a year of constant participation in such church services, and after some very positive experiences..., he suddenly experienced a turn into the opposite : ...an ecstatic mania that manifested itself in always greater highs during the blessing, and always greater depressions afterwards... The dependence on the prayer services became greater and greater," etc. It appears that not only was individual help for a presumably psychological ill person missing, but one wants to ask whether that church service itself was led in the wrong direction, so that such wrong developments became possible. We have to indeed consider that many endangered and unstable people come especially to such church services.

- In each gathering one has to consider that also psychologically ill people may be present. This presumes that the leadership retains an overview of who is present and what happens to the individuals. If the prayer "more, more" had the tendency to amplify the phenomena, it would lead in a wrong direction (d. the "negative example" of C 2). It may very well be that the more intensive coming of the Spirit points exactly in a different direction. Although from the outside it is not easy to distinguish, whether an outburst of feelings has a releasing function, or whether a negative effect is amplified (as if celebrated). The prayer partner must intensively seek after discernment and help foster temperance (cf. B 2 last page). Wherever the "demonic"

shows itself, it should not be allowed to have any room in public, and the person concerned should be taken aside.

- It is irresponsible if deep seated spiritual wounds are addressed in a general way by the leader, who might even encourage these individuals to stand up and be prayed over. Even if one or the other gives a positive report afterwards, it remains hidden how many are hurt through such practices. To sharpen the point: what occurs here is that, for the sake of an "effect," the dignity of the individual is not protected. The Holy Spirit helps such people quietly and one must not try to get the Spirit to work according to our wishes. Similar things apply to all suggestive behaviour on the part of the leaders.

- After such a church service it is essential to offer individual, pastoral discussions. Moreover, it would be wise to make possible general discussions where questions can be raised.

- It follows that parishes and communities should examine very carefully how often they should offer such "opportunities" and how much time should be given for thorough digestion.

- Just as individuals can be unsure about the appropriateness of certain expressions (sometimes renouncing them --which means giving them back to God), so too, a parish or community has to perceive when it is time to restrict or confine communal manifestations in spiritual self-control, and give the homily or personal quiet prayer precedence. If this happens in an attitude of greater love for God, **it will not be an extinguishing of the Spirit.**

C 4. Interpretation and Teaching

- The teachings and patterns of interpretation given by proponents and critics are not identical with the experiences. So, experiences can be authentic, even when they are --according to our own conviction-- insufficiently or falsely interpreted and treated by others.

- How often have we, in the Catholic realm, had experiences of the Spirit similar to the Pentecostals, and yet interpreted and put them into practice in a different way. Therefore, if there appears a certain similarity between ourselves and the non-denominational churches with regard to the "Toronto" phenomena, this does not mean that we interpret them in the same way or that we let ourselves be controlled by them.

- We cannot accept labels like the "third" or "forth wave" of the Holy Spirit; let alone that, according to this interpretation, this wave is a herald of the close return of Christ. If this movement is interpreted as a herald of a great "awakening," one must examine very carefully whether this is an (authentic) prophecy or whether, and to what extent, it is wishful thinking. What is decisive is the question about the authenticity of the occurrences in themselves, which is to be clearly distinguished from such a prognosis.

- Frequently the "Toronto-" happening is brought into connection with the "Prophetic Movement" (around 1990, USA and Canada) and is considered as its continuation (for instance in Toronto itself). Those "prophets" had spoken about a new intimacy. Many now see in these new effects a fulfilment of the first of the four characteristics mentioned by Paul Cain of a "victorious church of the end times." (¹⁷) Since we had rejected this teaching then, some think we now should also reject this event, which is interpreted in such a way. To be sure, if and insofar as we are dealing with a sovereign action of God here --we have made clear distinctions-- nobody can "monopolise" it, or write it off through his interpretation.

- No longer will we ourselves feel pinned down by a certain interpretation or prevent the Holy Spirit from working in us in similar way. In spite of such a (according to our view) false interpretation, it may very well

¹⁷ cf. our correspondence, regarding this: Rundbrief 4/92 and 1.2.3/93 available through Kommunikationsdienst, Innstr. 16, 94032 Passau).

be that representatives of this view are allowed to pass on an authentic gift of God, and we can receive that same gift. The Holy Spirit works in all the Christian churches and ecclesial communities and, in fact, often in the same way, despite of their different and partly contradictory theologies.

- That certain graces spread through certain people and places is a law of Salvation History (consider Religious Orders, spiritual movements, pilgrimage places, etc.). On the other hand in the Charismatic Movement we have often experienced the occurrence of similar events at different places and independently of each other. Thus we sense more noticeably the sovereign hand of God. In our case too, it shows that such an event is not tied to certain persons (such as those that come from Toronto). This is to be judged rather positively.

- The fact that many of these occurrences are not totally unknown in the history of Christianity enables us to learn from the history of spirituality ; to this belongs also the knowledge about the danger of misuse and malformation. In spite of that, we must consider that no time is a mere repetition of what has happened earlier. Therefore, the conviction that the Spirit "creates new things" is not unbiblical. Maybe, here we have a beginning phase which will change after some time ? Then we may not want to hold onto it or detain it, for "the Spirit blows when and where and how it will."

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