

# Cardinal Suenens and the ‘charism of healing’

Source: Book II of *The Holy Spirit, Life-Breath of the Church* ©,  
+L.J. Cardinal SUENENS

In Book II you find Malines Document 1 (Theological and Pastoral Orientations on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal), and Malines Document 2 (Ecumenism and Charismatic Renewal) and an appendix. The appendix includes **the text below** plus the Instruction on Prayers for Healing, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (= 0025uk on [www.stucom.nl](http://www.stucom.nl)).

In 2007 ICCRS published the booklet *Guidelines on Prayers for Healing*, approved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. See [www.iccrs.org](http://www.iccrs.org).

## Introduction

### NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Cardinal Suenens never wrote a specific document on the ‘charism of healing’. However, in his book *A New Pentecost?* He invites us to grow in faith so that we might open up to all the gifts from the Holy Spirit, including the ‘charism of healing’. At the same time, the Cardinal insisted on the importance of discernment and the need of pastoral orientations since the authenticity and credibility of the ‘pentecostal’ Renewal is at stake. He also wrote: “ .... (L’Esprit Saint Souffle vital de l’Eglise, Vol III p.299 en français)

This appendix compiles several documents that serve as a basis for those who are interested in the ‘charism of healing’: Firstly excerpts from the book *A New Pentecost?* Followed by excerpts from *Lumen Genium* and from the *Catholic Catechism*, and finally, the integral document *Instruction on Prayers for Healing*, published in September 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

From November 10 to 13, 2001, the Pontifical Council for the Laity organised a colloquium on ‘prayers for healing and the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church’,. On this occasion, Mgr. T. Bertone, Secretary at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, stressed the importance of the document *Instruction on Prayers for Healing* which restates contemporary prayers in the context of the Church tradition. Cardinal John François Stafford, President of the Pontifical Council for Laity, stated: “*To approach prayer for healing from a doctrinal, historical, spiritual and canonical angle is very positive.*” The Pontifical Council for the Laity considers that one of the fruits of this colloquium might be, in the long term, the ‘opening up’ of the new communities’ charisms and their integration into the parochial liturgical life.

The latter point comes close to Cardinal Suenens’ hope that “*the Renewal in the Spirit would not be a movement in the Church but the Church in movement.*”

EXCERPTS

1. From the book ‘*A New Pentecost*’

*“The ministry of healing played too great a role in the life of Jesus for us to imagine that his work of restoring physical and moral health is not meant to be continued by contemporaries, a faith that is expectant and confident, like that of the woman who reached out and touched the hem of his robe and was healed by a power that went forth from him.*

*We must renew within ourselves that faith in the power of the Lord to act in favour of the sick person. We should not be too hesitant in learning from examples of living faith that we see among our Protestant brothers. Then, too, we see within the heart of the Catholic Church, in those groups who are in touch with the Charismatic Renewal, a return to the practice of communal prayer for the sick. I begin to reflect on my own attitude when I visit the sick and find a group of Christians in the room, spontaneously praying for the one who is sick and laying hands on him in a gesture which recalls that of Jesus in the Gospel and expresses the Christian union with the brother or sister who is suffering.*

*Often, we are afraid to believe who in fact we really are – that is to say, we are hesitant to believe in the Christ who lives and acts within us. We do not dare believe in prayer which can include miracles.*

*Our prayer must embrace all the complexity of the world as it really is. There are sicknesses of every kind, seen and unseen, bodily, psychological, pathological, and those which originate from some long forgotten traumatic experience. Our prayer must include everything within us that is in need of healing; we must open ourselves in all the dimensions of our human suffering, past as well as present, to the light of God’s grace. We should remember that Jesus is the same yesterday and today, that he is Master of the past as well as of the present. If healings of a sudden spectacular nature are relatively rare, we must remember that slow, progressive healing is no less the*

*work of God. Prayer is not in opposition to medical healing, but rather at its heart.*

*Let us not forget that the Holy Spirit himself is that living and divine anointing in the power of which Jesus carried out his work.<sup>1</sup>*

## *2. Excerpts from the Council Vatican II Documents*

With regard to charisms, the Council adopted an open and receptive attitude expressed in a balanced text indicating that, provided that necessary prudence be observed, charisms should be recognized and esteemed in the Church of today. Indeed we might add: they are more important than ever before.

The Council, by drawing attention to the charisms, has called upon the People of God to become more aware of the abiding, active presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

There are two principal passages in the Conciliar documents which treat of charisms. The first is in *Lumen Gentium*, the Constitution *On the Church*:

*“It is not only through the sacraments and Church ministries that the same Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the People of God and enriches it with virtues. Allotting his gifts ‘to everyone according as he will’ (1 Cor. 12,11), he distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: ‘The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit’ (1 Cor. 12,7). These charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church.*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Spirit, Life-Breath of the Church*, Book I, pp. 54-57.

*Still, extraordinary gifts are not to be rashly sought after, nor are the fruits of apostolic labour to be presumptuously expected from them. In any case, judgment as to their genuineness and proper use belongs to those who preside over the Church, and to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (cf. 1 Th. 5,12; 19-21).”<sup>2</sup>*

The same teaching on the charisms can be found in the Decree *On the Apostolate of the Laity*.

*“For the exercise of this apostolate, the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the People of God through the ministry and the sacraments gives to the faithful special gifts as well (cf. 1 Cor. 12, 7), ‘allotting to everyone according as he will’ (1 Cor. 12, 11). Thus may the individual, ‘according to the gift that each has received, administer it to one another’ and become ‘good stewards of the manifold grace of God’ (1 Pet. 4,10), and build up thereby the whole body in charity (cf. Eph. 4, 16). From the reception of these charisms or gifts, including those which are less dramatic, there arises for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of mankind and for the building up of the Church. In so doing, believers need to enjoy the freedom of the Holy Spirit who ‘breathes where he wills’ (John 3,8). At the same time, they must act in communion with their brothers in Christ, especially with their pastors. The latter must make a judgment about the true nature and proper use of these gifts, not in order to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good (cf; 1 Th. 5, 12, 19-21).”<sup>3</sup>*

### 3. In the Catholic Catechism

The *Catholic Catechism* expresses in a very good way how charisms of individuals come together to build the Church, the Body of Christ:

*“Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them, and by all the members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true meaning of all charisms.”<sup>4</sup>*

*“It is in this sense that discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church’s shepherds. ‘Their office (is) not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good’, so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together ‘for the common good’.”<sup>5</sup>*

*“The Holy Spirit gives to some a special charism of healing so as to make manifest the power of the grace of the risen Lord. But even the most intense prayers do not always obtain the healing of all illnesses. Thus St Paul must learn from the Lord that ‘my grace is sufficient for your, for my power is made perfect in weakness’, and that the suffering to be endured can mean that ‘in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church.”<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Constitution *On the Church*, par. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Decree *On the Apostolate of the Laity*, par. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Catholic Catechism, n° 800.

<sup>5</sup> Catholic Catechism, n° 801.

<sup>6</sup> Catholic Catechism, n° 1508.

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