

(DRAFT)  
**COMMON WEAL, COMMON GOOD AND CHARISM**

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Outline:

The Question: Notable effects e.g. the generation of notable wealth, call for notable causes. Among the many possible and causes of this effect, could one of them be a charism of the Spirit? An affirmative answer will be adduced here and its significance suggested.

Part I:

- a. The general understanding of charism
- b. What happened to them in the course of the Church's history?
- c. The understanding of charism in Vatican II

Part II:

- a. Can charism and the generation of wealth be legitimately connected?
- b. On what conditions is a fit warranted?
- c. When is the connection unwarranted, a misfit?

Part III:

- a. What are the advantages of making the linkage?

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Part I:

a. The *charismata* are a species of which *grace* (the favor of God) is the genus. They were understood to be ubiquitous in the early church. "To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."(I Cor 12:7)They enabled ordinary people to do extraordinary things at times; but mostly they enabled many to do mundane things extraordinarily well. They were understood to have their provenance in the Spirit and were believed by those who had come to believe in Christ to have been given not for the recipient but for the needs of others or for upbuilding the communities of which they were a part. So they were not conferred on the individual Christian for his or her growth in union with God as other graces were, but "for the common good."

It is not obvious that Paul had the public or the extra-ecclesial community in mind when he saw the arena being affected by the charisms. It is clear that he was thinking of the charisms affecting communities of Christians as small as a family and as large as the (local) church. Two peculiarities about the charisms in Paul should be noted here. First, he is only suggestive and not complete in his listing of charisms since his interest is in correcting their abuse, not in laying out treatise on them. (He doesn't seem to have to

correct them often when he writes to non-Corinthians.) Since this had not been generally understood in the Church, theologians and the magisterium tended to miss the implications for the ministry of the Church in the world. They were presumed to be rare and usually eccentric to the ordinary workings of life. I will contend that they were meant to be a main vehicle that God would use to bring about human flourishing, both spiritual and material. The second thing to notice about charisms is that in Peter's speech at Pentecost, parroting Joel, he speaks of God as intending to pour out a portion of the Spirit on *all* humanity in the form of varied gifts.(Acts 2:17)

b. There is a question of what happened to charisms once the structures like the presbyterate and episcopate become more developed. In the early church, furthermore, Adoptionism and Montanism wreaked havoc on the idea of the charisms, making them seem like anti-hierarchical and eccentric energies. They became so muted in the course of time that they came to be understood to have been intended by God to bring attention to the church at the beginning but that once it was established they weren't necessary, thank you! A change in the baptismal liturgies which before 400 A.D. were more like commissioning events that would send the baptizati to continue the mission of Jesus in the world, diminished the initial understanding of the Church in its relationship to the world.

One area of church life where charisms were spoken of with some frequency before Vatican II was in religious life. They were spoken of in this sense: religious of a given congregation or order were understood to be participating in the charism of their particular founder or foundress e.g. a Jesuit was understood to participate in the charism of Ignatius Loyola.

Connecting the ministry of the church or the apostolate of the laity with the charisms was rarely done by churchmen or theologians before Vatican II. Yves Congar was a happy exception. One of the reasons for this was the odd slowness of theologians to differentiate charisms from the other ways the Spirit enriched the People of God, e.g. by graces, gifts and fruits of Spirit etc.

c. A dispute erupted in the Vatican Council II's deliberations. Cardinal Ruffini assured the assembled prelates that charisms -- a subject which was not in the prepared early documents of the Council but which began to surface in the open fora when the preparatory texts were being discussed -- were for the early church but that today "we cannot stably and firmly rely on charismatic lay persons for the advancement of the church (since) charisms are very rare and entirely singular." This sentiment was roundly refuted by Cardinal Suenens and the fact that the idea of the charisms made it into the documents explicitly 14 times indicates how wrong Ruffini was. The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity #3, for example, speaks of right and duty of each believer to use their respective charisms in the church and in the world for the good of mankind.

Part II

a. The particular provenance or origin of a considerable amount of wealth is a major ethical concern. It has been commonly thought that considerable wealth has often been generated on the backs of those who were exploited and not justly compensated for the accumulation of it. This sentiment is only as valid as it is empirically established in each case. But there seems to be good reason for the suspicion. This would leave the question of the linkage with something generated in the person by the Spirit problematic.

Does the Spirit give charisms for the upbuilding of the economic common good or for the material well being of the human community? The question does not seem to have been posed heretofore by the church for three reasons. First of all, charisms, if looked at at all, have been largely understood in ecclesiological terms rather than in a church-in-world framework. Second, when dealing with economic/wealth issues the church has invariably gone the ethical analysis route not the theological much less pneumatological route which charisms inevitably take one. Third, the Church has been slow to come to the bar of human rights but, having done so in this century, is sure that every human being has a right to the material conditions that are commensurate with the dignity of one made in the image and likeness of God. But this moral claim is made on the community that can respond to it. If the Spirit has been at work in the Church and the world fomenting the articulation of these moral claims, is the Spirit not to be looked for as working in those who can respond to these basic human needs expressed now in terms of socio-economic rights? Hence, the question: is not the economic well being of the human community of major interest to God? Is not economic well being of the human community in a continuum with the mandate to Adam and Eve to till and cultivate the garden? Is it not in continuity with the revealed interest of God that there be human flourishing, well being, even abundance arrived at by a complementarity between what God gives by way of seed and what "man" does by way of planting, nurture and use? There is an obvious double agency operating between God's initiatives and humans' response to them in the fields of worship, moral integrity, compassion and growth in the virtues. Why not, then, in the matter of the generation of wealth? Is that so "worldly" an enterprise as to be unworthy of God?

b. The fit has some warrant when and if there is a just (i.e. proportional) distribution of the profits or of the wealth that has been created by those responsible for its generation. Also when there has been a commutative justice enacted in the compensation given those whose labor has generated the wealth. Also when the common good is the purview and motivation of the one(s) generating the wealth. Also when the working conditions of the workers who are a constitutive part of the generation of the wealth are decent and their wages living. These are necessary but not sufficient conditions, of course, for adducing something of the Spirit. These are four ethical considerations. If these ethical issues are resolved in the affirmative, then the road is clear for a possible theological nexus to be made between charism as cause and generation of wealth as effect.

When these ethical conditions are not met we are liable to be susceptible to much connivance since it is easy to make theological assertions independently of the ethics "on the ground." Theology or faith assertions are easily come by. But they are also easily made a cover story for actions prompted by self aggrandizement or greed. This is all the

more obnoxious when the exploitation of people is not even adverted to or the self deception is so embedded that the generators of the wealth fancy themselves and are even lionized in the public sphere as paragons of public-mindedness. One all too obvious historical instance of this is Andrew Carnegie. But there are many others.

The advantages of making the connection are striking. Once the claim is made that a given person's source of the generation of the wealth is the Spirit or God, then the onus is on the generator to use the wealth for the sake of the community. If charisms are gifts given for the community then the community must be the recipient of its fecundity. This doesn't necessarily mean an immediate divestment of the wealth into the community. Prudence often dictates that the wealth should be ploughed back into the business in which case it is the growth of the business redounds to the community in jobs and salaries and increased taxes and revenue base. Another portion of the wealth could go to the renewal of the environmental resources that have been used to generate the wealth. But, however the decision is made, it is incumbent on the one generating the wealth to prove that the community in its human and infra-human base is being upbuilt in all its parts.

b. On what conditions is a fit between the work of the Spirit and the wealth warranted? We have already suggested the ethical ones. But what follows are those more directly connected to Christian spirituality and its ideals.

Purported charisms must be subjected to the test Paul subjected them to in his *Locus Classicus*, I Cor 12-14. Briefly, Paul here explains that the charisms are distributed to "each (member of the Corinthian Christian community) "for the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."(I Cor 12:7) The context here was how worship is upbuilt by the charisms. Since then they have not been limited to worship but include what upbuilds the human community and leads people to human flourishing. Material well being has been attributed to any number of causes like demand and talent and training and timing and imagination and creativity and leadership and opportunity and connections and inheritance ... the list is endless. But the hypothesis being examined in this paper is that a cause not hitherto imagined could be a source of the increment and its ensuing abundance, namely the Spirit.

What interests Paul in the 12th chapter of Corinthians is the mindset of the individual worshiper. Does that person see that he or she is responsible for enriching the community and the community is responsible for enriching them. This enrichment comes about because of the Spirit's intention to bring an abundance to the community through the idiosyncratic charisms of the members. But the charismed must see their particular giftedness as organic with the giftedness of the many of which the individual is a part. The hand is in need of the eye; what good would it be to have a hand without sight etc? To be a Christian is to be in an organism that is Christ's own body. The members of the body seek to glorify God by living for the well being of the body's members. "Whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God." There is no private existence with a private agenda for those who "have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Their baptism was the event that radically changed their lives and its agenda.

With baptism they had conferred on them the infused virtues of faith, hope and love which were to be the primary energies enabling them to participate in the life of the Trinity and obey the one commandment Jesus taught: "love one another as I have loved you." He embodied all the charisms of the Spirit. "In him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The gift of *caritas* that came with baptism has been given a gloss by the present Pope. John Paul has developed a new criterion for discerning "the presence and life giving action of the Holy Spirit" namely the virtue of solidarity. (#40 of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*) Solidarity for him is a virtue that "is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."(#38 *idem*)

John Paul, it seems, is supplying here a criterion and a virtue to be striven for that transcends the motivations of entrepreneurship as these are commonly viewed both by the practitioners themselves and outside observers. Solidarity is an ideal to be striven for, a *telos* to be aimed at, in the exercise of one's matrix of gifts (charism) and in the use of the wealth that accrues from that activity. We are beyond ethics here, whether the virtue of generosity or the vice of greed. The Pope's analysis of solidarity is creative; he sees it as deriving directly from the infused virtue of *caritas* and from the fact of being organically linked to one another in Christ. He is seeing love of neighbor in terms that the Church has not seen before.

So the 13th chapter of I Corinthians is not less germane to our subject than the 12th. Paul is asking what good it would be to have an extraordinary charism (like speaking in tongues of angels) if the carrier of it did not have love? Love is what lasts, not the fortune made nor the fame attained nor the honor given one's name. This scales the disposition with which the charism is exercised, namely love, higher than the product the charism produces. Not only what is done in love but also within the horizon of faith and hope. These three "abide" i.e. they are there before, during and after the life of the person and his/her charism. "But the greatest of these is love."(I Cor 13:13) Love of whom, love for whom? Love of the God who is the source of the charism and love for those for whom it is exercised.

c. Is this apples and oranges to take this text and read the possibility into it of a charism for generating wealth out of love for those who can benefit from it? I am sure the intention of the charismed person should not be generating wealth. Rather, wealth should be a byproduct of the matrix of gifts the person has used in arriving at this outcome. What, then, should the intention be? In my terminology, fidelity to one's charism. But a more universal language than this is, of course, necessary. Like: being true to oneself, to what one is gifted to be and do. A love of oneself should produce the motivation that is faithful to oneself in the sense of true to who one has been called to be and to that particular matrix of gifts one has been called to exercise. Call and charism are of a piece. The call comes from the charism that is in a sense pleading first to be recognized, then

developed and exercised, the increment of which is for the common good. Some are gifted to do that which will make money but making money is not their push point. Becoming who one is meant to be is and what one is meant to do, given their unique matrix of gifts is their push point. Charisms are, among other things, one of God's ways of meeting the needs of his children. The ability to meet human needs, material as well as spiritual, is the purpose of ministry and the purpose behind gifting those who can meet those needs.

The 14th chapter of Corinthians rounds out Paul's disquisition on the normativity he sees as necessary for an exercise of the charisms that passes the test of authentic Christian spirituality. In this chapter he is looking at the "encouragement and consolation" that accrues to the community as a result of the individual's charism. Paul is clear that a capability that does not benefit others or "edify" the community should not be given the stature or weight of a charism. Specifically, Paul is wrestling with the privatism of one of the community's gifts ("speaking in tongues"). He gives it low marks when contrasted to another gift ("prophecy") which not only aids the members of the community but also those outsiders who have come to the community's worship service. If the extension I have been giving the charisms is legitimate, this criterion should also suggest an importance to those charisms that benefit many rather than one, materially.

III What are the advantages of the linkage? 1) It brings the often other-worldly spirituality of the church into the very "worldly" work of Christians as they do this in their daily lives. 2) It carries the onus of making a living to a new plane of significance. 3) It brings the stature of call to the recognition and development of one's inner aspirations and "talents." 4) It grounds ministry in the work one is best suited for in the world. 5) It grounds the mission of the church in the Christian's exercise of his or her talent. 6) It grounds how one can best fulfill the command to "love one another." 7) It addresses the deep personal need for identity and meaning. 8) It locates generating wealth to at best a secondary position, far behind being faithful to oneself and acting from a self appropriation that benefits others. 9) It translates the Council's understanding of God's call to holiness as the "perfection of charity" and living "the fulness of the faith" into terms that have to do with self fulfillment and self transcendence. 10) It redefines the meaning of "public office" as something God has called one to exercise for the sake of the public by the discovery, development and exercise of one's charism. 11) It locates spirituality in the life of the Spirit and sublates a morality that is concerned only with matter of conscience.