

# An Attempt to define the Charismata in the main Christian Traditions

An evaluation from a Pentecostal perspective

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*The aim of the present article is to analyse the way in which the main Christian traditions define the charismata, or the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As we shall see, the definitions provided by the Catholic, the Eastern Orthodox or the Reformed Theologies are very broad, while in Pentecostal theology charismata have a rather technical meaning. Finally, we will observe that a good clarification of the concepts in question could help the development of the interfaith theological dialogue, from the pneumatological point of view.*

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## I. The doctrine of *charismata* in the Eastern Orthodox Theology

Orthodox studies refer to the charismata of the Holy Spirit, but these references are often succinct. A precise definition that would be universally valid is difficult to articulate.<sup>1</sup> In Orthodox theology, the term “charisma” is used with various meanings, ranging from the general idea of “grace” or “manifestations of grace” and that of a very special grace which manifests itself in a supernatural way through the life of the recipient. Thus, Paul Evdokimov believes that “spiritual life [of the believer] is entirely charismatic.”<sup>2</sup> Charismata (among which are mentioned “the vigilance of spirit, the guarding of the heart, the calling of the name of Jesus”) “restrain and stop any inner dialogue that has an evil suggestion before it becomes a tacit consent, passion and spiritual bondage.”<sup>3</sup> One can easily see the meaning of personal spiritual help that “charismata” have in the Russian theologian’s thinking; they could easily be mistaken for divine grace which accompanies the believer, helping him in

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<sup>1</sup> Theologian Ion Bria, who provides in his dictionary a generous definition of charismata, acknowledges that “there is no absolute definition of them.” Ion Bria, *Dicționar de teologie ortodoxă*, București, IBMBOR, 1981, “harismă”, p. 191).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Vârstele vieții spirituale*, București 1993, p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 161. The author speaks even of the “charisma of a happy death” (p. 170) or the “charisma of martyrdom” (p. 170), thus expanding the meaning that the term has at other Orthodox theologians.