

Bari: Sunday 13 April 2003

### Talk 3: The Importance of Catholic – Pentecostal Dialogue

**Peter Hocken**

In this third talk, I want to move beyond the perspectives of *Dominus Jesus* towards a constructive interaction between the Catholic Church and the Pentecostal movement. Yesterday I mentioned that one reason why DJ caused such offence was that it made a negative statement about Protestant Churches, without showing any interest in adopting a positive approach or saying something constructive about what these bodies represent in the Lord's sight.

First of all, we need to recognise the significance of the world-wide Pentecostal movement at the start of the twenty-first century. For a movement that is only a century old, its present size and dynamism is truly astonishing. There is much to suggest that Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity is the thrust of the Holy Spirit for the future. All this suggests that to dismiss the Pentecostal phenomenon as an explosion of "new sects" is neither intelligent nor helpful.

I have argued elsewhere that the Pentecostal movement forms part of a sequence of **revival streams**, being preceded by the Evangelical and Holiness, and followed by the charismatic<sup>1</sup>. Although there have been dialogues of the Catholic Church both with the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals, I do not think that theologically we have yet come to terms with this phenomenon of revival streams. The tendency is to fit them into a pattern of ecumenical relationship that derives from our relationship to historic Churches formed as a result of schisms and breakaways. The revival streams do not really fall into this category, but in some

way represent new impulses of spiritual life not tied to the teaching or leadership of any one leader. Of the four major revival streams, the Evangelical dates from the 1730s, the Holiness stream from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Pentecostal from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the charismatic from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of these four streams, only the Pentecostal had no lasting expression within the historic Protestant Churches, but ended up totally as a new grouping on the outside. But even where there were new denominations formed, the revival stream came before the denominations.

I should perhaps remark that the terminology of "waves" favoured by some is not very helpful. For "waves" disappear to make way for the waves that follow. Whereas with these four revival streams, the earlier streams have continued to flow even as they were joined by the later streams.

In these revival streams, there has always been spiritual fellowship across church boundaries. What is unique to the charismatic stream is that this fellowship has extended for the first time to the Catholic Church. However, this fellowship in the Spirit across church boundaries is unfamiliar territory for Catholic theologians. It is significant that there was no mention of the charismatic renewal in the Ecumenical Directory of 1993 or in *Ut Unum Sint* of 1995. The omission of any reference to the charismatic movement in *Ut Unum Sint* is all the more noticeable in view of the renewed emphasis of the encyclical on spiritual ecumenism. I think the reason is clear: for the Catholic mind, spiritual unity without theological agreement and/or without sacramental expression appears to

---

<sup>1</sup> See *The Strategy of the Spirit?* (Guildford: Eagle, 1996). Also translated into German and Czech.

be either a chimera or a dangerous confusion. Such claims to an experienced spiritual unity can appear to be nothing more than emotional enthusiasm.

However, all those of us who have been living such a new-found unity, as all those who take part in the Consultazione Carismatica Italiana, know that it is not just based on passing emotions, but on an objective working of the Holy Spirit in all our hearts. The ability to praise the Lord spontaneously, to witness to Jesus, to intercede, to exercise spiritual gifts; the thirst for the Scriptures, a longing for the second coming – these are not simply emotional, but represent objective giftings and workings of the Holy Spirit. None of these are the result of mere human effort or striving; they can only arise from the work of the Spirit. But in the charismatic movement, we from different confessions have received the same gifts. This enables us to exercise these gifts and capacities together, and results in new bonds of friendship and collaboration.

However, this experienced unity in the Spirit is not yet the full communion that characterised the Church of the New Testament. The fulness of unity involves the whole of the human: it involves the right relationship between the spiritual, the psychic and intellectual, and the bodily. The genuine spiritual unity being experienced in the charismatic stream and in this Evangelical – Catholic encounter, has to expand out from the spiritual realm into the sphere of the mind and of the body. We should understand this spiritual unity we have been given as a gift, an impulse from the Lord, to enable us to deal with our differences and so move towards a unity that is organic and incarnate. If we charismatics can articulate this understanding of our unity as a step towards the fuller goal, it will enable many Church leaders and theologians to take it more seriously and to see its ecumenical significance.

At the heart of the revival streams is a lifting up of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ – accentuated in the Pentecostal and Charismatic streams by the life-giving mission of the Holy Spirit. This is at the heart of their challenge to the Church. For this reason, I would argue that the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Pentecostals (also with the Evangelicals) is one of the most important dialogues – because what is at stake is so huge. It is then quite wrong to dismiss these dialogues as marginal when compared to the dialogues between historic Churches. In fact, the challenges from the revival streams address our deepest problems and malaise within the historic expressions of Christianity. In meeting these streams with an open heart, we are showing an openness to address the roots of our difficulties in the Church today.

The question I want to raise is this: Do not the massive new revival streams arise precisely because of weaknesses, neglects and failures of the historic Churches? I say “historic Churches” rather than simply the Catholic Church because in their origins the revival streams in the Protestant world arose as a protest and a corrective to the condition of the mainline Protestant churches.

#### A Twofold Challenge

An authentically Christian response to the challenge of the revival streams including the Pentecostal movement in line with the humble spirit of the Pope’s appeal would have, I suggest, two main components:

- (a) the confession of sin; the acknowledgment – first before God – of the weaknesses, the neglects, the failures in the Catholic community;
- (b) the recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in the revival streams, together with an honouring of all that is holy and of God.

Let us look more closely for a moment at both these aspects.

### The Confession of Sin and of Weakness

What is happening I believe is that the Holy Spirit is leading us deeper into what renewal means. There can be no renewal of life without repentance for sin. It is not a matter of making dramatic or sudden statements. It is to do with a change of heart. It is to turn away from ideological mentalities that refuse to look at reality and to take responsibility.

There is not time to develop this point in detail. So I will take just one example, that is, Church attitudes to Bible reading by the Catholic faithful. One of the most life-giving decisions of Vatican Two was the recommendation that Catholics should read the Bible regularly. “Access to Sacred Scripture ought to be wide open to the Christian faithful.”<sup>2</sup> But we know that this had not always been the stance of the Catholic hierarchy. Does not an authentic renewal require an acknowledgment of past failure? Do we not have at least to confess in all honesty that the Catholic Church has not always encouraged Bible reading and study? Can we not apply here also the words of the International Theological Commission in its reflection on *Memory and Reconciliation*, when it says, “What needs to be avoided is an apologetics seeking to justify everything and an undeserved fixing of blame”<sup>3</sup>

This raises an aspect of Catholic behaviour that does not do us credit, and which still – I think – stems from fears about “the simple faithful”, who are of course not as simple as we often think. When the Catholic Church makes major changes – whether at one moment as at Vatican Two or over a period as with much theological renewal - it does not ordinarily acknowledge that major change has occurred, much less confess that reform was truly needed. The changes are typically presented as in total continuity with all that went before.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Dei Verbum*, para. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Section 4, Intro.

I suspect that this insistence on a linear view of history and development where all is continuity and there is only smooth development has some connection with the distressing phenomenon of a gap between official teaching and much popular practice. Because we never publicly acknowledge the weaknesses and the distortions in past Catholic patterns, what needed correction survives – often upheld by appeals to the practice and the authority of previous centuries. The old and the new can then both appear to be valid options.

### Recognising and Honouring the Work of God in the Revival Streams

Such a recognition and an honouring may be easier in the English-speaking world, where the revival streams largely had their origins and where there is a plurality of Christian Churches and denominations. In the majority Catholic countries, the first reaction to the revival streams in the Catholic Church has often been to denounce them as sects. At best, they were irrelevant nuisances, at worst sinister corrupting forces. This judgment was not based on any study, research or first-hand encounter. It represents what one could call an ideological deduction from Catholic teaching: since the Lord has established the one Church on the basis of apostolic succession and sacramental ordination, anything outside this framework – especially what attacks it – must be harmful and in no way the work of God.

What is called for is an objective, truthful, and discerning assessment of this phenomenon. This is not really possible without relationships. An objective assessment would recognise the size and growth rate of these movements; would seek to understand why they are growing and how; would consider both theological and socio-cultural factors; would seek to identify the key components that are found across the world. It is unfortunately the case that theologians lag behind most other

disciplines in taking this phenomenon seriously and engaging in objective studies. Often it is the sociologists and the anthropologists who lead the way<sup>4</sup>.

The ecumenical and dialogical spirit is one that requires a humility from the Catholic Church. First, when we see a work of the Holy Spirit, we should thank God for it – not first criticise its weaknesses and failings. Secondly, we should avoid a merely apologetic response, as e.g. saying that all these elements are found in Catholic renewal movements – maybe adding that they exist in a fuller and healthier context in the Catholic renewal movements. That is a way of reducing the challenge. It is to lapse again into ideology: because Catholics believe that there is a fulness in the Catholic Church (which I accept doctrinally), therefore everything must be more fully present there (which factually I do not accept). Of course, these elements are found in Catholic renewal movements, but not always with the same strength and biblical underpinning as in the Pentecostal and new charismatic streams.

#### The Theological Status of Pentecostal Groupings

The question of the theological status of revivalistic bodies that have formed new denominations of a free church pattern is different from that of the theological status of historic Protestant denominations of the classical Reformation. With the revival streams, I think that we have to study how they came into being in order to determine their theological character and weight.

With the Pentecostal movement, what came first was revival, a current or stream of new life. The denominations came later: either

as in a few cases where recent Holiness denominations accepted the Pentecostal movement virtually in toto or a decade or more later when the absence of structures was increasingly seen to cause major pastoral problems. In this process, it seems to me that what is God-given is the initial current; I am not saying that the formation of the denominations has nothing of the Holy Spirit and her wisdom, but the role of human decision is far more evident. Local Pentecostal assemblies may represent something more churchly than the denominations.

In regard to the theological status of Pentecostal denominations and assemblies, I do not want as a Catholic to dispute the foundational argument that the fulness of Church is constituted by the liturgy and sacraments celebrated within the historic succession. But I would want to argue – in a way that DJ does not raise – that the Pentecostal movement is of huge importance in itself and in its significance for the whole Christian world, including the Catholic Church. It confronts us with elements without which the Church cannot truly be what she is called to be. So the alternative is not: either you are Church and you matter or you are not really Church and you do not matter! Within this perspective, I regard the Pentecostal movement as of the highest significance, and then the local assemblies; the denominations seem to me to be of a lesser significance.

But these remarks are deliberately tentative. There has not been enough serious study and dialogue to determine the real meaning and significance of everything Pentecostal: worldwide movement, local assemblies, denominations. We need to focus on the question: “What is the work of the Holy Spirit in each partner to the dialogue?” Within this perspective, there can be a profound and respectful meeting between the liturgical-sacramental Church in its bodiliness and the revival streams with their spiritual vitality.

---

<sup>4</sup> E.g. among sociologists: David Martin (Lancaster, UK), and among anthropologists: André Droogers (Amsterdam), Karla Poewe (Calgary, Alberta) and Simon Coleman (Durham, UK).

Finally, I want to remark on how we have our different ways of avoiding the challenge of the cross. Renewal movements within the Church avoid the cross when the challenge of the Holy Spirit is toned down to avoid or lessen disapproval. In this way, Renewal can become domesticated, and pietistic, with little prophetic voice. Revival outside the historic Churches avoids the cross by separation and transfer; that is to say, people only meet with those who agree with them. When your local Church is uncomfortable, you move and find comfort elsewhere. There may be more prophetic elements, but with divided quarreling prophets!

---

This document has been published on web site  
StuCom, <http://home.hetnet.nl/~stucum> as  
document 0102uk.

His first and second talk in Bari, April 2003 are  
document 0101uk and 0102uk.

Dominus Iesus is StuCom0042uk and 0042.

An other article of P. Hocken on StuCom:  
0100uk. (More articles can be published after  
June 16th, 2003.)

Who is Peter Hocken? See StuCom 0104uk.

Some English documents on the Catholic-  
Pentecostal dialogue: 0002uk, 0004uk, 0023uk,  
0093uk, 0096uk.

Dutch documents on this dialogue: see overview  
StuCom document 9003