

Living in a Kairos Moment

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In 2016 we are living in a kairos moment. A vision embracing Azusa, Rome, and Zion, which would have appeared utopian only five years ago no longer seems so crazy. Rome is opening to Azusa. The extraordinary boldness in faith of Pope Francis is opening up new possibilities all the time. Francis speaks of "going out" and going to the "peripheries". In the sphere of Christian unity/ecumenism he has particularly gone out to the Pentecostals, the charismatics and the Evangelicals. I believe that this is because he is a man who understands existentially the role, the inspiration, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He is fully open to the creativity and newness of the Spirit of which he speaks frequently. His words here can be very strong:

"Are we open to "God's surprises"? Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of the Holy Spirit? ... Do we have the courage to strike out along the new paths which God's newness sets before us, or do we resist, barricaded in transient structures which have lost their capacity for openness to what is new?" (Pentecost, 2013)

In another homily Francis invited those present to ask for "the grace not to be afraid of the newness of the Gospel or of the renewal that the Holy Spirit carries out; and not to be afraid to let go of the short-lived structures that imprison us." (July 6, 2013)

"Our God," the Pope continued, "is a God who always does new things. And he asks from us docility to this newness". (Daily Homily, Jan 20, 2014).

"the doctors of the law did not like this, they found it "dangerous", putting at risk "the doctrine which they, the theologians, had been making for centuries". ... it was a law "made for love, in order to be faithful to God", but it had become a closed regulatory system." (Homily, October 13, 2014).

Where can we see Pope Francis receiving new things from the Holy Spirit? Very evidently in his openness to Evangelicals and Pentecostals. In what had become traditional ecumenism, in Catholic eyes, the Catholic Church is closest to the Orthodox churches, then to the Anglicans and the Lutherans, followed by the Reformed, the Methodists and the Baptists. In this sequence, corresponding to more and more divisions, the Catholic Church was furthest from the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals. This scale was determined by the presence or absence of episcopal ministry, the number of sacraments, and reception of historic creeds. The greatest distance being between Catholics and Pentecostals/Evangelicals seemed to be confirmed by their hostility to the Catholic Church and their aggressive evangelism of Catholic peoples not even considered to be Christians.

Now with Francis, Evangelicals and Pentecostals are no longer on the fringe of Catholic ecumenism, but find a place at the centre. Instead of doctrine and church structure as the first criteria for ecumenical association, a living love for Jesus Christ and an openness to the Holy Spirit move to the centre. This revolution represents a reappropriation of an ancient conviction that theology is a second order activity, one

that is necessary but that follows the work of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, conversion, and discipleship. It is summed up in an axiom dear to Pope Francis: "Realities are greater than ideas." In these terms, Azusa represents REALITY, the reality of the Holy Spirit, the reality of the love of Jesus, the reality of the love that drives believers to evangelize in the power of the Spirit. The doctrine of the first Pentecostals belongs to the sphere of ideas.

[I come from England, where the origins of the Catholic charismatic renewal were a bit different from many other countries where the Renewal arrived from the outpouring in Pittsburgh, USA, in February 1967. In England, there was one stream of Catholics baptized in the Spirit, not through contacts coming from Pittsburgh and the USA, but through direct contact with Pentecostal Christians. I was baptized in the Spirit in October 1971 through coming in touch with these Catholics. So from the beginning of my charismatic involvement, I knew that the Renewal was the same grace as that poured out at Azusa Street, but in a very different church context. I knew I had to respect and honour the Pentecostals, that I could receive much from them – but from their life and praxis not their denominational doctrine. In the language of Pope Francis, I was receiving from the Reality they were living, but not all their ideas, their theology.]

In his letter *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Francis has three paragraphs on ecumenism (244 – 246). In the last he develops the teaching of St John Paul II on ecumenism. In 1995, JP2 had written: "Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an 'exchange of gifts'."¹ Francis adds to this the role of the Holy Spirit: If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us."² In the Catholic charismatic renewal, the Catholic Church is reaping what the Holy Spirit has sown in the Pentecostal movement and among the Protestant charismatics. What are we as Catholics to receive from other Christians? It is what the Holy Spirit has sown among them. What are other Christians to receive from the Catholic Church? It is what the Holy Spirit has sown in the Catholic tradition.

Catholics may ask why are other Christians often not open to receive what we think the Holy Spirit has sown in the Catholic Church: the ministry of the bishop of Rome, the sacraments, the communion of saints around Mary, the mother of Jesus. The answer is simple: the way the Catholic Church has lived these doctrines has not been clearly seen as the work of disciples of Jesus led by the Holy Spirit of God. Here we encounter another remarkable reforming pattern of Francis: it is the abandonment of all defensiveness and apologetic propaganda that refuses to admit any abuses, any scandals, any distortions in Catholic life and teaching. Instead there is a new honesty, a willingness to answer questions from anyone, even aggressive journalists. He is not afraid to say how things really are, even in the Vatican. [In his presentation to the Cardinals before the conclave began in 2013, he criticized the "self-referential church": "When the Church does not come out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referential and then gets sick. (cf. The deformed woman of the Gospel). The evils

¹ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), 28.

² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 246.

that, over time, happen in ecclesial institutions have their root in self-referentiality and a kind of theological narcissism. In Revelation, Jesus says that he is at the door and knocks. Obviously, the text refers to his knocking from the outside in order to enter but I think about the times in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out. The self-referential Church keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not let him out." The self-referential church talks about itself, not about Jesus. We find this same honesty in his famous Christmas address to the Roman Curia in December, 2014. Here we see the Pope of mercy and of honesty: his honesty and directness is not judgmental, it is full of mercy and understanding for human weakness. But he is like an experienced doctor, who quickly diagnoses and identifies diseases. "The Curia is called constantly to improve and to grow in communion, holiness and wisdom, in order to carry out fully its mission. And yet, like any body, like any human body, it is also exposed to diseases, malfunctioning, infirmity. Here I would like to mention some of these probable diseases, "curial diseases". They are the more common diseases in our life in the Curia. They are diseases and temptations which weaken our service to the Lord. I think a "listing" of these diseases – along the lines of the Desert Fathers who used to draw up such lists – will help us to prepare for the sacrament of Reconciliation"³. There follow 15 of these common diseases. One example to show how direct and forceful Francis is: No. 9: "The disease of gossiping, grumbling and back-biting. ... It is a grave illness which begins simply, perhaps even in small talk, and takes over a person, making him become a "sower of weeds" (like Satan) and in many cases, a cold-blooded killer of the good name of our colleagues and confrères. It is the disease of cowardly persons who lack the courage to speak out directly, but instead speak behind other people's backs." The media take this message as a devastating attack on the Curia. No, it is the faithful pastor who speaks gospel truth to all his flock: "Brothers, these diseases and these temptations are naturally a danger for each Christian and for every curia, community, congregation, parish and ecclesial movement; and they can strike at the individual and the community levels." He goes on to say, "We need to be clear that it is only the Holy Spirit who can heal all our infirmities."]

Pope Francis is taking the Church back to its foundation in Jesus and his teaching. I see a pattern of going directly to Jesus and the Gospels through the Holy Spirit that is then nourished by the tradition, rather than what many Catholics do – going to the later tradition and finding the Lord there. One sign of this is that his daily meditations at Mass are almost invariable on the Gospels. His descriptions of sin and disease in the church that is "sick" maybe shock us because as Catholics are not accustomed to hearing this message from our pastors. In fact, we are accustomed to encouragements that assure us how well we are doing, when there is much evidence that all is not well. But this is the flip side of all Francis says about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We have to receive this convicting work of the Holy Spirit to receive and experience God's healing, the new life in Christ, and the positive work and gifts of the Spirit. An example here is Pope Francis's rejection of all clericalism, and his insistence that all ordained ministry is service, with no one being higher and more important than anyone else. This is a major challenge for all of us priests who were trained in a different school! Not the

³ Francis, Christmas message to Roman Curia, December 22, 2014.

priest who has to approve everything, who mistakes authority for control: but the priest who accompanies as a brother, who has a responsibility to discern.

Notice how in all these instances, Pope Francis is directly addressing areas of age-long Protestant reproach against the Catholic Church: authoritarianism and clericalism, ignorance of the Bible, severe limitation of the role and influence of lay people, producing largely passive congregations. The answer can no longer be argumentative apologetics refuting all accusation. It has to be humility, openness to the Holy Spirit, and transparency before the world.

I want now to see how Francis brings this message of reform and new life to the Catholic charismatic renewal. I am sure you all know that Francis really identifies himself with the Renewal. It seems that this was the fruit of several leading Pentecostal pastors in Argentina praying over him in 2006. The result is that Francis is more specific in identifying the great grace of the Renewal for the Church. The previous Popes since 1967 have all encouraged the Renewal – in fact, more fully and faster than the leaders of other Churches and denominations. But Francis is going further and saying things his predecessors did not say:

1. He uses the term **baptism in the Holy Spirit**.
2. He speaks of the Renewal as a current of grace (*corrente di grazia*) sovereignly poured out by the Lord.
3. So the Renewal has no human founders and is not an ecclesial movement.
4. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is for the whole Church. Our task is to spread this grace to the whole Church.
5. The Renewal is inherently ecumenical.

In fact, these convictions are not new. In the first years, many of us involved were convinced of this. In 1967 the Catholic charismatic renewal broke out and spread rapidly throughout the Catholic world, and after only eight years was welcomed by Pope Paul VI, who described it as a “chance for the Church.” This was such an amazing thing – it was like the power of the Holy Spirit being made visible. It was natural for the first charismatic Catholics to think and dream big about this move of the Spirit. However, as we moved into the 1980s it was clear that what was officially welcomed was the Catholic movement, and not the whole current of grace spreading across the churches and spawning many new non-denominational groupings.

We were often careful of what we said in public, as it could sound arrogant, the typical pride of those enthusiasts who think what they are involved in is the most important thing on the planet. But with the exception of a few far-sighted leaders like Cardinal Suenens of Belgium and Blessed Paul VI, the potential of the Renewal was not seen by most bishops, who either gave it a low-grade welcome (a help for beginners perhaps) or saw it in terms of dangers to be avoided. The Renewal leadership was very focused on having the Renewal officially welcomed by the Catholic authorities, and this led to them playing down the ecumenical element and any connection with Azusa Street and the Pentecostal movement. Catholic charismatic renewal was approved by the Popes

(more gradually by most of the other bishops), but in the Vatican its ecumenical inter-denominational character was seen for some years as problematic. We can see the fruit of this today, where in many countries there is hardly any relationship between Catholic charismatic renewal and the renewal currents among Pentecostals, Evangelicals and other Christians.

Now in summer 2016, we have a big task. When Francis met with 51,000 people from the Renewal in June 2013, he invited them all to come and celebrate the 50 years of Renewal with him in Rome at Pentecost 2017. Throughout the world, this was understood as the Pope inviting the people of CCR to Rome to celebrate 50 years of CCR. But in fact the Pope is wanting something different. He wants to thank God for the whole Pentecostal-charismatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit taking the occasion of the 50th anniversary of CCR for such an ecumenical gathering, when the pope wants us all together to beg the Lord for a new Pentecost for the whole body of Christ and for the whole world. I have to go to Rome in mid-July for a meeting planning a big ecumenical gathering for Saturday June 3, 2017, in the Circo Massimo, where many Christians were martyred. Huge numbers of CCR people are preparing to celebrate CCR, unaware of the Pope's desires. Why is this? Because they have never thought of or been taught that the Renewal is an ecumenical grace.

This situation shows us that as in the whole work of God and the history of the Church, there is both glory and shame. There are wonderful works of the Lord to be celebrated. But there is also a history of compromise, of trying to receive the grace without the full challenge of the Holy Spirit, of wanting the grace and glory without any humbling and any confession of our sin. Again the Metanoia theme. So what is it for which the Catholic charismatic renewal needs to ask forgiveness of the Lord? For its timidity and lack of prophetic boldness, in particular its failure to welcome and take hold of the ecumenical grace of this renewal. For assuming that the Catholic Church can be fully renewed on its own without the work of the Spirit among other Christians. For our failure to immerse ourselves in the Scriptures. Do we Catholics who have been in the Renewal for 30 years or more know the Bible as well as our Protestant brothers and sisters? Do priests in the Renewal know the Bible as well as Pentecostal and Evangelical pastors? Also for playing only a feeble role in initiatives of Reconciliation with heartfelt confession of the sins of the past. [(German Protestant initiative of 1995 regarding lands occupied by Nazi Germany.) Prayer journeys: slave ports, aboriginal peoples, the Irish border.]

While in CCR we need to humble ourselves before the Lord, we should also be astonished and grateful for what the Lord has done. Who could have imagined at the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement that this current of grace would spread to the Catholic Church? Who could have imagined this empowerment and mobilization of Catholic lay people on such a massive scale? Who could have imagined a Pope from Latin America leading this surge of the Holy Spirit?