

## ECUMENISM WITH EVANGELICALS

Lanckorona: January 23 – 25, 2015

### Talk 1: A New Situation

Since the election of Pope Francis, a new era in Catholic – Evangelical relations has opened up. Francis is the first pope to have had close brotherly relationships with Evangelical and Pentecostal pastors before his election, and the first pope to be accustomed to praying spontaneously with them.

Since his election, Francis has had a series of meetings with Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders, all unofficial and not mentioned in the official Vatican list of papal audiences. Some of these came about through the Pope's friendship with Tony Palmer, a bishop in a small convergence grouping working for Catholic – Evangelical – Pentecostal coming together. So, for example, the Pope sent a message in January 2014 via Tony Palmer to a Kenneth Copeland conference in the USA; on June 24, he had a meeting organized by Palmer with Copeland, John Arnott of Toronto, James Robison from Texas, Geoff Tunnicliffe of the World Evangelical Alliance and others. Within a week Tony Palmer was dead, with doctors unable to save his life about a motorcycle accident in England. At the end of November Francis had a meeting with Loren Cunningham, the founder of YWAM and his wife. In these meetings which were much longer than usual papal audiences, they discussed what they could do together for the Lord.

At the end of July, Pope Francis was the first pope to visit a Pentecostal church, when he went to speak to the Pentecostals at their church in Caserta, led by Pastor Giovanni Traettino, whom the Pope knew before his election. There Francis asked forgiveness from the Pentecostals for the persecution suffered by the Italian Pentecostals under the Government of Mussolini

that was supported in this by the Catholic authorities. At the start of his message there, Francis said: “My brother, Pastor Giovanni, began speaking about the centre of our life: to be in the presence of Jesus.”

Also relevant is the close relationship between Pope Francis and the new archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. Welby comes from the more evangelical wing of the Church of England. On Welby's second visit to the Vatican, he took with him Rev. Nicky Gumbel, director of the Alpha course. Justin Welby had been a member of Gumbel's parish in London before going off to theological college.

Now following the synod on the Family, the Vatican held a major conference on marriage and the family inviting other Christians and non-Christians to present their convictions concerning the importance of stable family life. Among the Protestants invited were Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback, an Evangelical megachurch in California, and Russell Moore, a prominent Southern Baptist from the USA. (Also Bishop Tom Wright, Anglican biblical scholar from England.)

All these developments clearly mark a new phase in ecumenical relations for the Catholic Church. Until now, the most important relations and dialogues have been those with the Orthodox, the Anglicans, and the Lutherans, all liturgical traditions that honour the historic Creeds. Relations with the free churches were less developed, and seen as less important, though Methodists were higher up the ecumenical scale than the Baptists. Opposition to ecumenism and to relations with Catholics were highest among Pentecostals and conservative Evangelicals. This is where Pope Francis is having a real impact.

In these talks I want to look at some of the issues that these new relations with Evangelicals and Pentecostals will bring to

the fore. These issues are mostly different from those that have been prominent in classical ecumenism with the Orthodox and with historic Protestants. But who are the Evangelicals and who are the Pentecostals?

### The Evangelicals

First many Evangelical free churches today are quite different from classical Evangelical free churches in the past. This is because since about 1980 many Evangelical congregations have been strongly influenced by the charismatic movement, so that their worship is charismatic in style (music ministry prominent, repetitive choruses and songs, worship leader playing a major role alongside the pastor, a pattern of praise followed by the preaching, followed by prayer ministry, prayers for healing and for deliverance). This is very different from the older Evangelicalism that was very serious, with hymns rather than choruses and songs, with long sermons expounding the Scriptures and calling for conversion. The number of anti-charismatic Evangelical assemblies is now a minority.

Traditionally Evangelicals have emphasized the unique authority of the Bible, they have preached the atonement, the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins, the need for personal conversion and repentance, the priority of evangelism. For Evangelicals, revival is a key ideal: revival meaning conversions and repentance happening on a mass scale, whether through a sudden visitation from God (the more Calvinist view) or through campaigns of great evangelists (the more Wesleyan or Arminian view). Most Evangelicals when they speak of revival are not linking this with particular campaigns or missions: so one writer on revivals has written: "Revivals can only be prayed down, they cannot be worked up."

### The Pentecostals

The Pentecostals, who date only from the last 110 years, share the Evangelical convictions concerning conversion and the atonement, though their emphasis has been on Pentecost and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals believe in a transforming experience of the Holy Spirit after conversion (baptism in the Holy Spirit) accompanied by visible evidence (for most Pentecostals speaking in tongues).

### The Situation Today

Today in continental Europe there are the older free churches (Mennonite, Baptist, Methodist, Czech Brethren). Not all of these would be Evangelicals in the Anglo-American sense (Evangelikal in German). Probably the Baptists are the most typical classical Evangelicals. Most older free churches practice believers baptism by immersion and reject infant baptism, but not all.

Then besides the Pentecostals, there are the new charismatic free churches like Word of Life (Livets Ord) in Uppsala, Sweden and the Faith Church in Budapest, which are charismatic free churches. In Poland, the free churches that had started in the Catholic charismatic renewal are of this type, whether or not belonging to a network like Word of Life. Virtually all these churches reject infant baptism.

### Revival Movements First

The Evangelical and Pentecostal movements are above all movements of new life. They are not first of all denominations. The denominations are subsequent forms of organization of church life.

The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches are first of all Churches, first of all corporate bodies rooted in traditions of worship (liturgy) and doctrine (creeds). So the ancient Churches have a total character about them – representing a coherent

body of teaching, of worship, ways of formation and teaching. They have liturgies, liturgical years, creeds, catechisms.

By contrast, the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals as revival movements are grounded in certain core convictions rather than a complete creed. So, core Evangelical convictions are: the Bible as sole authority; the death of Jesus on the cross alone as providing atonement for all sins; the need of each person to believe in the saving death of Jesus, to repent for their sins, and to have a personal relationship with Jesus; the priority of evangelism in Christian mission. The real Christian is a converted person. To these core convictions, the Pentecostals would add the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the soon coming of the Lord Jesus in glory. The real Christian is alive in the Holy Spirit.

The historical reason why the Evangelical and the Pentecostal movements are revival movements is that they arose as forms of protest and of spiritual longing: protest against formalism and dead religion and of longing for spiritual life, for holiness, and for effective mission. In fact, the Evangelical revival movements were not specifically anti-Catholic (they presumed Catholics did not know the Lord) but were protesting against formalism and lack of life in the established Protestant churches.

This difference between complete faith systems (the historic Churches) and revival movements with core convictions makes possible a range of forms of interaction between the two. In the past, it has often been confrontational: the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals then judge negatively people in the historic Churches: they are not converted, they are dead not alive spiritually. However, a more constructive interaction is possible – and has been happening through the charismatic renewal: the older Churches can then receive the positive

element in the core convictions: the need for personal conversion, the need to preach the message of the cross, the power of the Holy Spirit received through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In other words, the core convictions of the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals can become principles of renewal for the older Churches.

So we find that recent popes have been emphasizing convictions that are characteristically Evangelical: each Christian should have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; evangelization is a top priority for the Church. Pope Francis has even told the Renewal a Pentecostal conviction: it is your task to take the baptism in the Spirit to everyone in the Church. However, while Catholics can and usually should agree with the positive Gospel formulations of Evangelical Christians, we reject or qualify some of their “Only” statements: e.g. Scripture as the only authority (which is a rejection of the teaching authority of the Church, of the Pope and bishops). With the Protestant *sola fides* (faith only), the Catholic Church accepts today that we are saved by faith, but does not accept any formulation that suggests that our works, what we do does not matter.

In fact, since the Protestant Reformation arose as protests against things wrong and deficient in the Catholic Church and its practice, – and the other Protestant splits were a consequence of this – there is a first responsibility on the Catholic to demonstrate a renewed and biblical Catholic life and practice that provokes the Protestants, the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals, to overcome their negative judgments of Catholic doctrine, theology, and practice.