

The Ecumenical Grace of Charismatic Renewal

For many years a major tension has existed in the Catholic charismatic renewal (CCR) between, on the one hand, the need for the renewal to be authentically Catholic and to contribute in a significant way to the renewal of the Catholic Church, and, on the other hand, to do justice to the ecumenical character of the charismatic movement from its beginnings and to realize its major potential for Christian unity.

Both concerns have a fundamental legitimacy. From this angle, the tension is necessary. In this article I suggest ways to maintain this tension so that neither tendency takes over from the other: either the unity concern becomes so dominant that the need for CCR as an identifiable expression of charismatic renewal is called into question, or the concern to be Catholic leads to an ignoring or playing down of its ecumenical character and potential.

The Origins

From its beginnings as a movement in 1967, CCR was blessed through the ministry of Protestant charismatics and Pentecostals. The famous Duquesne week-end in February 1967 resulted from Catholics reading *The Cross and the Switchblade* by then Pentecostal David Wilkerson. Some Catholics were baptized in the Spirit through the ministry of Episcopalians Richard Winkler in Wheaton, IL and Dennis Bennett in Seattle. The first prayer-meetings at Notre Dame were helped by a Pentecostal, Ray Bullard. Francis MacNutt received through Episcopal healing pioneer, Agnes Sanford. In England, CCR had two sources: one the movement arriving from the USA, the other from Catholics baptized in the Spirit through the ministry of Pentecostals. In France and Italy there were also ecumenical contributions to the origins. In Colombia, Harald Bredesen lit the flame. In Peru, a visiting ecumenical team triggered the beginnings of CCR. In Korea, CCR began through the ministry of a Swedish Pentecostal called to Korea in 1970 to pray for Catholics to be baptized in the Spirit and through a Pentecost retreat she organized with Episcopalian Archer Torrey.

The origins of CCR also manifested a strong orientation toward the renewal of the Catholic Church, which had no exact parallel among Protestants. The Second Vatican Council had placed a vision for the renewal of all Catholic life firmly in the Catholic consciousness. The emerging group of young leaders included graduates from Notre Dame, who had been active in Vatican Two-oriented campus groups. This vision that CCR should serve the renewal of the Church was formulated in the book *Where are we headed?* (1973) by leading strategist, Steve Clark.

These two elements were evident in all the large CCR conferences of the early-to-mid 1970s, both at Notre Dame and the mid-Atlantic conferences at Atlantic City, NJ. The ecumenical component was visible in the invited participation of Protestant charismatic teachers, both for major talks and to lead workshops, and the honoring of guests from other Christian traditions. The orientation to renewal of the Church was clear in the teachings, in the role of the liturgy and in the presence and support of Catholic bishops. Both elements were evident in the life of new communities with an ecumenical make-up and an ecumenical vision. This holding together of the tensions reached its climax in the great Kansas City conference of 1977, in which the mornings were spent in church groupings, the afternoons had optional workshops from leaders in all traditions, and the evenings brought everyone together in the giant stadium.

A Period of Consolidation

From 1980, the period of mushrooming growth appeared to be over, at least in the USA, and a period of consolidation followed. It included more structuring of the renewal (including diocesan liaisons, liaisons' conferences, a more representative National Service Committee) and the move of the International Renewal Office from Brussels to Rome, followed by the retirement of Cardinal Suenens and the first appointment of a bishop in the Vatican with responsibility for CCR. People spoke about “moving to the center of the Church”. In the Vatican, CCR came under the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which had responsibility for lay movements, and so for what have since become known as the “new ecclesial movements”. This brought definite advantages for the recognition of the place of CCR in the Catholic Church, but it also tended to obscure unique features of CCR – that it had no human founder like the other movements, as well as its ecumenical origins and character.

It is maybe not surprising that this period saw a decline in the ecumenical expressions of renewal. This prompts the question: was this decline a factor in a loss of dynamism in CCR and a decrease in its impact?

New Ecumenical Stirrings

While the ecumenical expressions in CCR were lessening, the Holy Spirit was raising up new witnesses to unity. Several pioneer figures (notably Michael Harper, then Anglican, Lutheran Larry Christenson, Pentecostal Vinson Synan and Redemptorist preacher, Fr Tom Forrest) came together in the mid-to-late 1980s to launch a new ecumenical network at the world-wide level, a pattern repeated in Europe and North America. Papal preacher, Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, whose charismatic initiation had begun in Kansas City, was deeply convinced of the ecumenical character of renewal, and all present will remember his electric talk on unity at the Brighton (UK) conference of 1991. At this time Charles Whitehead from England was emerging as a major figure in CCR; Charles has an Anglican wife and he was baptized in the Spirit through the ministry of an Anglican priest. So it is no surprise that he has constantly championed the ecumenical component of Renewal (he is currently chair of the International Charismatic Consultation). Charles Whitehead provides an outstanding example of holding the ecumenical and the Catholic together.

Theological Developments

Only at Vatican Two in 1964 did the Catholic Church first endorse Catholic participation in the movement for Christian unity. In its teaching on the Church and baptized non-Catholics, the Council taught clearly for the first time that other Christians and their ecclesial communities are not simply “outside” the one Church. Since then, official Catholic documents have a language for describing their situation: other Christian bodies are in “imperfect communion” with the Catholic Church, that is to say, there is a real communion in the things of Christ within the one Body of Christ, but there is not yet the full or perfect communion that characterizes the Church in communion with Rome. This change in our church understanding has not yet adequately influenced the ways that we Catholics think and talk about “the Church”. When we speak as though other Christians are totally “outside”, there is something lacking in our understanding.

Holding together the Catholic and the ecumenical belongs to the heart of our Catholic faith. So John Paul II wrote on unity in 1995: “ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of 'appendix' which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does” (*Ut Unum Sint*, para. 20). Following the Council it is no longer acceptable for Catholics to define what it means to be authentically Catholic in anti-Protestant terms – that the more you emphasize what Protestants deny, the more Catholic you must be! To be Catholic is to embrace the fullness of the biblical revelation, the fullness of Jesus Christ, the universal service of the Pope and to stand against all individualistic tendencies that weaken the ecclesial and corporate character of Christian faith. So, in *Ut Unum Sint*, John Paul II describes his ministry as Pope as a “ministry of unity” to bring the whole Body of Christ to its fullness of being “one” as Jesus and his Father are one.

Many are concerned today about the future of CCR. Fr Cantalamessa has said that if the renewal is not prophetic, it is nothing. At the heart of the prophetic dimension of CCR is its ecumenical character. When we lose that, we lose the deep dynamism of the Spirit. But what can we do to ensure that CCR is both Catholic and ecumenical? First, and most fundamental, we have to help Catholics to acquire a new post-Vatican Two sense of Catholic identity, that is defined in terms of Catholic fullness and no longer by what we are against! Second, we can ask what are the gifts that the others will bring to the Catholic fullness that unity will require. This corresponds to the teaching in *Ut Unum Sint* that: “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an 'exchange of gifts'.” (para. 28). Third, we can bring the grace and empowerment of the Spirit in the Renewal to the wider Catholic work for Christian Unity. Lastly, we need to pray. Ecumenism can never be reduced to a program! It is always a calling that can only be received in prayer.