

Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Europe

What is the right yardstick of assessment? An evaluation of CCR as compared to the overall Church situation in Europe? A comparison with other new ecclesial movements? A comparison with other churches or with the non-denom sector? I want to suggest that we lift our gaze and assess the Renewal primarily in relation to the purposes of the Holy Spirit as revealed through the baptism in the Spirit and the distinctiveness of CR.

The Renewal as Prophetic

First, the Renewal is prophetic by its nature (Cantalamesa: “The Renewal is prophetic or it is nothing.”). That is to say, the coming of the Holy Spirit of God is always profoundly challenging: to the individual Christian, to groups, to the whole Church. The Holy Spirit convicts us of all that is unholy, all that does not measure up to the revelation and the gift of the Lord. The Holy Spirit raises our gaze, so that we are enabled to see reality from God’s perspective. This is the very essence of the prophetic gift.

In my view, the terminology of baptism in the Spirit affirms this prophetic dimension more clearly than the language of une effusion de l’Esprit. One reason for this is its inherent connection with the event of Pentecost. Another is the accompanying understanding from the New Testament that Jesus is the one who baptizes in Holy Spirit. This point underlines the sovereign character of the Lord’s action in baptism in the Spirit. Mary Healy and I have tried to make this point central in the new ICCRS document on baptism in the Spirit. It is this dimension makes the Renewal inherently prophetic. When we are baptized in the Spirit we are taken

hold of by the sovereign Lord and plunged into the Trinitarian life and communion that is at the heart of the new covenant in Jesus. It is this sovereign element that shows forth the Lordship of Jesus over the whole Church. It enables us to hear and sense the voice of the Lord, and so to enter into His rejoicing and His grieving over the Church as it exists today. The sovereign element is expressed and lived in all exercise of the spiritual gifts (charisms). The Lord raises us up to give us His perspective on everything. The more we live this reality in the Renewal, the more habitual it becomes in the way we see the Church and the world. In other words, being prophetic is not primarily about receiving words in ministry to people or taking risky politico-social stances in the name of the Lord, though both belong to the sphere of the prophetic. So in looking at the Renewal in Europe today, we have to ask: how prophetic is it? How much is the Renewal putting forward God's vision for the Church? How much is it helping the Church to surrender her whole life to the leading of the Lord and of His Spirit?

In the new ICCRS document, we have a section on the relevance of John Paul II's teaching on the institutional and the charismatic dimensions of the Church, which need each other and both of which belong to the constitution of the Church. In a paper I gave earlier this week to the French leadership near Paris, I tried to show how this distinction helps us to overcome the weaknesses of the two main Catholic accounts of baptism in the Spirit, which both contain some truth but which are on their own not adequate to the scope and character of the Lord's work in the Renewal.

Renewal Organized and Not Organized

Second, we need to remember that the Charismatic Renewal is always wider than organized renewal. Baptism in the Spirit is a sovereign grace of God and all who are baptized in the Spirit are part of this work of God, whether or not they are members of a charismatic group or community, whether or not they attend CCR events, whether or not they have any links with ICCRS. So in fact, as we look at CR in the widest sense among Catholics in Europe today, I see three sectors:

1. All those communities and groups who are related to officially recognized renewal bodies such as ICCRS, NSCs, CFCCF, i.e. all those represented here.
2. All those groupings that are charismatic and (majority) Catholic, but which are not related to such bodies as ICCRS or to NSCs. Johannes Fichtenbauer is here representing the European Network of Communities, which form an important European part of this second category. The Sword of the Spirit would also fit here.
3. Particular communities and individuals who are charismatic and Catholic but do not belong to either of the first two categories. Possibly one could include here the Catholics who belong in some Protestant or non-denom groupings, but who see themselves as Catholic members serving in that sphere. I know some people in this category, particularly young people.

Rooted in the Scriptures

To be truly prophetic requires being deeply rooted in the Scriptures. The depth of prophetic utterances is directly connected with the depth of our penetration of the Word of God. So this immediately provides us with a point for examination of conscience: 1. How deeply are we soaked in

the Word of God? 2. How much are we leading others into this immersion in the Scriptures? I have to say that this is a weakness in many places in the Catholic renewal when compared with Protestant believers moving in the Spirit. We have to learn what it means to be authentically Catholic as we discern and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. It does not mean being quiet and causing no ripples. But it means truly seeking the Lord and being willing to say what we are hearing, but doing so as ecclesial community, submitting our input to the discernment of the body, in community and under the leadership of the church's pastors.

Come, Lord Jesus as the Cry of the Spirit

It is impossible to be deeply prophetic without a clear vision and longing for the coming of the Lord in glory. This is the ultimate longing of the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit imparts to the Church: "The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'." (Rev. 22: 17). We have to get over the idea that there is something weird, fanatical or fundamentalist in this focus on God's ultimate goal. I want to quote from a book by Bishop Albert de Monléon, op, written in 1998: "Les charismes sont données par l'Esprit Saint afin de rendre témoignage au Christ et en vue de la croissance de l'Eglise, mais ils sont données pour le temps qui sépare la Pentecôte de la venue du Seigneur dans sa gloire. Ils sont exercés dans l'attente « de la Révélation du Seigneur », afin de préparer et de hâter la manifestation définitive du Royaume qui vient. »¹ This is totally in line with the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that says that the Our Father "reveals the eschatological character

¹ Albert de Monléon, *OP Rendez témoignage: Le Renouveau charismatique catholique* (Paris : Mame, 1998), p. 118. He continues : « En accueillant le renouveau de l'exercice des charismes, l'Eglise reactualise donc son « attente de la Bienheureuse espérance. » (p. 119), immediately citing *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, para. 28).

of its petitions” (para. 2771). It later underlines that the petition “Thy Kingdom come” “refers primarily to the final coming of the reign of God through Christ’s return.” (para. 2818). It is a constant witness of movements of the Holy Spirit that they awaken in Christians the “blessed hope” and produce a deep longing in us for the final fulfillment. I have to say in all honesty that this characteristic is stronger in other segments of the charismatic movement than in the Catholic charismatic renewal, though I know some Catholic communities where this hope is very strong and clear.

I think we should ask ourselves why this is. We should put this question to the Lord, and I suspect that we will get a fast answer! One reason would seem to be the less deep grounding in Scripture, for the coming of the Lord is a truly central theme throughout the New Testament. There is probably more about the second coming in the New Testament than any other theme. Another factor is that eschatology has been largely left in practice to the Evangelical free church world, in which it has often become entwined with some teachings that are problematic from a Catholic standpoint (especially the doctrine of the rapture). Because of the ease with which people can adopt weird theories and predict the date of the Lord’s appearing, despite His words “You know not the day nor the hour”, Catholics have been leery of this whole area. This is tragic not just for the Catholic Church, but for the whole body of Christ, as the eschatological longing has always been central to all the liturgies of the Church from the oldest times.

How can this lack be remedied? First, by our becoming more deeply rooted in the Scriptures. Second, by our becoming more aware of the Jewish roots of our faith, for it is

impossible to recover the messianic hope fully without the people called by the Lord to be the bearers of the hope. It is remarkable how when Paul speaks to the Jews of Rome, he says: “For this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.” (Acts 28: 20). Not because of what was the hope of Israel, but because of what is still the hope of Israel.² Contact with Messianic Jews, who are majority charismatic, faces us with the coming Messiah-King with a new force. Third, by becoming more deeply liturgical. We need to grow in our understanding of how the whole liturgical - sacramental framework of Catholic life is stretched between the first coming of the Lord and the second. See for example para. 1130 in the Catechism: “The Church celebrates the mystery of her Lord ‘until he comes,’ when God will be ‘everything to everyone.’ Since the apostolic age the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit’s groaning in the Church: *Marana tha!* The liturgy thus shares in Jesus’ desire: ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you ... until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ In the sacraments of Christ the Church already receives the guarantee of her inheritance and even now shares in everlasting life, while ‘awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus.’ The ‘Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come ... Come, Lord Jesus!’ “” The blessed hope is expressed vividly in most of the acclamation proposed after the consecration in the Eucharistic prayer; for example, “Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.”

² „when one considers the future, God’s People of the Old Covenant and the new People of God tend towards similar goals; expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah” (Catechism, para. 840).

As we recover the blessed hope, we will find: 1. That the Lord gives us a clearer sense of direction and priorities in everything; 2. That there is a new level of vitality; 3. That there is a deeper joy.

The Renewal as Ecumenical

The eschatological dimension can lead us into the ecumenical. This is an absolutely essential dimension for a prophetic renewal. As I heard a friend say, “The Lord is not coming back for a harem, but for one bride.” The Lord will not come back for a divided church in which the parts have no love for each other. In his address to Lutheran (Evangelische) leaders in Erfurt, Germany, in September, Pope Benedict said: “This prayer of Jesus is not simply something from the past. He stands before the Father, for ever making intercession for us. At this moment he also stands in our midst and he desires to draw us into his own prayer. In the prayer of Jesus we find the very heart of our unity. We will become one if we allow ourselves to be drawn into this prayer. Whenever we gather in prayer as Christians, Jesus’ concern for us, and his prayer to the Father for us, ought to touch our hearts. The more we allow ourselves to be drawn into this event, the more we grow in unity.”

The origins of the Renewal were inter-confessional in so many countries and areas, not only virtually everywhere in the English-speaking world which is familiar with a plurality of confessions. This list includes France, Germany, Rome, Netherlands, Belgium, South Korea, Colombia, and Peru. I am convinced that the way spontaneous movements of the Spirit start reflects something of God’s plan and purpose - we might say before we humans try to improve upon it! Maybe the new factor that has most encouraged ecumenical contacts and

expressions in the Renewal over the last fifteen years has been the Alpha course. The participation of many bishops from all over the world in Alpha training sessions must have had an influence at the level of the hierarchy.

Tensions over the Ecumenical Issue

In some European countries, there have been marked tensions between the more ecumenical expressions of CCR and the more Marian expressions, especially in Germany and Austria. In my view, it is important for Renewal leaders to stand up for its inherently ecumenical character. But as Catholics we should strongly resist colluding with an inherent opposition between ecumenism and a love of Mary. It is true that some forms of Marian emphasis are not very compatible with a heart for unity, but the biblical heart of Marian understanding cannot be anti-ecumenical. If I may say so, England and Wales have provided an excellent example here, where the strong influences of Charles Whitehead and Myles Dempsey have combined to prevent any splintering of the Renewal. In Ireland, there has been promotion of the charismatic in markedly different ways by the NSC and by Paddy Monaghan and the Evangelical Catholic Initiative, another instance where the ecumenical issue has been prominent. In the Netherlands, an ecumenical component has been maintained, following some power-struggles in the early years, and the CCR has held a theological dialogue of their own with the Pentecostals.

The Fraternity of Catholic Covenant Communities and Fellowships was founded in the early 1990s with the encouragement of Bishop Cordes (now Cardinal) to provide a solid formation in the Catholic tradition and with a deliberate distancing from the idea of ecumenical communities. The

examples of ecumenical communities, particularly perhaps the Sword of the Spirit, were felt by some to have failed to maintain adequately the Catholic identity of the Catholic members. It was partly the lack of any explicitly ecumenical dimension in FCCCF that led to the formation of the European Network of Communities around the year 2000. The ENC communities were mostly younger communities, many in Eastern Europe, that had been helped by Youth With A Mission, and in general they did not feel comfortable with the CFCCF model. More recently, the current chair of FCCCF, Matteo Calisi, a pioneer in charismatic ecumenism in Italy and whose community in Bari, the Comunità di Gesù, had always championed an ecumenical approach, has been working hard to introduce an ecumenical dimension into FCCCF, with any resistance or lack of enthusiasm coming I gather from the older representatives. So next year's FCCCF will be devoted to ecumenism.

New Situations and Challenges

The rise of many new young communities in Eastern Europe does not seem to have had much to do with the work of official national service committees. I am most familiar with the situation in Slovakia, a majority Catholic nation, where there has been a big explosion in new charismatic communities. Some of their leaders I have spoken with did not even know that there was a national office for CR in Zvolen. This gap between the official structures and the reality on the ground needs to be examined. In such cases, it would be a mistake for the ICCRS leadership to assume that they are in touch with charismatic renewal in a country just because there is an NSC and an office. I have some evidence

that a parallel situation exists to a lesser degree in Poland, and I would be interested to hear Darek's comments.

Another evangelical-charismatic centre that is exercising an increasing influence, also on Catholics, is the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, led by Mike Bickle. So there are moves now to establish Catholic houses of prayer, often shaped by the Kansas City model, a process to which Kim Kollins is strongly committed. The longest-established of these houses of prayer would seem to be that in Augsburg, Germany, led by Johannes Hartl. Recently I have had contact with houses of prayer in Warsaw and Wroclaw, Poland, so that last month with the permission of Cardinal Nycz I spoke at a meeting in Warsaw hosted by their two leaders. These two young men were former Catholics who had become Pentecostal, but who two years ago heard the Lord telling them to return to the Catholic Church, which they immediately did. These houses of prayer exhibit many of the most creative ideas and activities of the new charismatic church networks, and the process of receiving these new patterns and styles into a Catholic framework may not be easy. One is the challenge long experienced within Catholic Renewal circles open to other churches of how to integrate Eucharistic adoration into free church patterns of praise and intercession. I believe that there must be a way as I believe that both are fundamentally from the Lord. But the wider question is bringing the wisdom of the Catholic spiritual tradition into these ecumenical situations with other Christians seriously pursuing a deeper life in Christ and the Spirit. In particular, how to apply the traditional teaching of the three stages of spiritual growth: the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive, and about the transition from more discursive forms of prayer to the more contemplative. I

noticed that in the bookshop at IHOP, they have several books by Catholic spiritual writers, ancient and modern. There is a hunger and recognition of a deep need. First, we have to know more about our own spiritual heritage. But here we have a big problem: most priests even know little about this heritage. Here we need to reflect on the particular characteristics of charismatic experience following baptism in the Spirit. There seems to be a difference between the old patterns in monastic-conventual life and what has been happening in the Renewal. An obvious one is that the traditional pattern was that Christians only arrived at the stage of contemplative prayer after a long period of arduous penance and purification. In the Renewal, there is an intervention of God with baptism in the Spirit, which is not the reward for years of spiritual discipline, but is poured out on all, the immature and the unstable as well as the wise and the disciplined. As a result, there is enlightenment (illumination) from the start, which means that the purification has to follow if the work of God is not to be dissipated. People can sense being led into contemplative patterns, often through speaking in tongues, rather early on. In a way this is all a fruit of Vatican Two's teaching on all the baptized being called to holiness of life!

The newer communities and the houses of prayer are typically the initiatives of young leaders with enterprise and vision. They are unlikely to feel at home in prayer groups of people over 50 or 60 years of age, typically much attached to the way they have prayed since they began some years ago. In the last five to ten years, there appears to have been more success in the Renewal programmes for young people in several nations: England, Netherlands, Germany, for example. But the young people are often seeking a framework in which they can live

their Christian lives to the full, an expectation unlikely to be met in the regular charismatic prayer groups. They may want to form a new community (I am sometimes asked for advice from such young people) or they may be attracted to a more dynamic and larger community, such as Chemin Neuf that holds a large youth event each summer at Hautecombe. The World Youth Days have been an important experience for many, being with young people from many nations in the universal communion of the Catholic Church. Here a major challenge for the Catholic Church, and not just for the Renewal, is giving young people, especially those with leadership gifts, real opportunity to lead and to develop their own ideas without having to ask permission at every turn. I have had much more involvement with young people since I returned to Europe from the USA in 1996. My experience is that they do respect authority and seek discernment from older teachers when they are being fed and nurtured by the older leaders, when they are trusted and given real scope and freedom to serve.

The Need for Charismatic Scholars and Theologians

Finally I will mention one of the smallest nations in Europe, Latvia. I was there two weeks ago in Riga for a meeting of the European Pentecostal-Research Association's conference. On the opening evening we had a message from four church leaders: the new Catholic archbishop of Riga, a Lutheran bishop, the main Baptist leader and a Pentecostal. Much the most impressive message came from the Catholic archbishop, who spoke of his experience of the charismatic renewal and of the charisms, and of a dissertation he wrote on the gift of discernment. He was the first Catholic bishop I have heard who spoke about hearing and watching John Wimber - and

saying he was impressed by his discouragement of hyped-up emotions. But at the EPCRA conference one of the best papers was from a young Catholic professor of theology in Innsbruck, filled with charismatic fire, who gave a really creative paper on “Arguing in the Holy Spirit”. It was all about how to handle conflict in the Spirit. Two main points were:

- A principle for “arguing in the Holy Spirit”: Jesus’ critical solidarity with his opponents
- A purifying orientation to Christ as a prerequisite for an “Arguing in the Holy Spirit”.

As a prophetic reality the Renewal poses huge challenges to the way we function and the way we think. Unless there is some serious theological thinking going on among intelligent young people in the Renewal, it seems unlikely that the Renewal can meet the expectations it arouses and fulfil its promise. As the prophet Isaiah says, “so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Is. 55: 11). We have been entrusted with an explosive gift. Are we ready to be courageous for the Lord in the power of the Spirit? Are we more concerned to keep it under wraps and fulfill the safety code?