

Chemin Neuf Assemblée Générale August 2012

Talk 1: Charismatic Ecumenism: I

The theme for both my talks is charismatic ecumenism. The first will be more theological and more historical, providing a foundation for the second, which will be more spiritual and more practical. I will begin by underlining some major points from the first talk:

1. The charismatic renewal is inherently ecumenical; it is an ecumenical gift of new life from the Father in the Holy Spirit. We need to receive the Renewal which issues from baptism in the Spirit as an ecumenical gift that we are to live in accordance with the Spirit who is its life.
2. In the Catholic Charismatic Renewal we have not deeply received the whole Renewal and baptism in the Holy Spirit as an ecumenical gift. As a result the charismatic contribution to Christian unity has been limited and under-developed.
3. The present time is a particularly propitious moment for an articulation and a practice of the charismatic ecumenism called for by the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

1. The Charismatic Renewal as Inherently Ecumenical

This conviction was expressed in my book *One Lord One Spirit One Body*, published in 1987 [French translation *Rassemblé par l'Esprit* (1989)]. The evidence for the Renewal being ecumenical of its nature can be presented in three points:

- a. In the charismatic movement, the same grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit was poured out on Christians from almost all churches, confessions and traditions, as well as on some Jews for whom it was the discovery of their Messiah and Lord. The fruit was the same, as have been the distinctive features such as new intimacy with the Lord, a facility for praise, a love of the Scriptures, a heart to evangelize, a new awareness of other spirits, and in particular the charisms that mark the Renewal. In consequence, Christians from different traditions were able to share these endowments of the Holy Spirit in worship, in ministry and in service.
- b. In the spread of the Renewal to the Catholic Church, many Catholics were baptized in the Spirit through the ministry and influence of Protestant charismatics. The Protestant influences upon those present at the Pentecost-event that launched the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the USA in February 1967 are detailed in the book *As by a New Pentecost* by Patti Gallagher Mansfield, one of the Catholic participants. These influences included two books that were best-sellers: *The Cross and the Switchblade* by then Pentecostal preacher David Wilkerson on his ministry among drug addicts in New York City, and *They Speak with Other Tongues* by a Protestant journalist, John Sherrill on the beginnings of Pentecostal blessing within the Protestant churches; a more proximate influence was an inter-denominational prayer group that met in the home of a Presbyterian lady.

In France, Père Laurent Fabre and Père Bertrand Lepesant, the founder of Puits de Jacob community in Strasbourg, were baptized in the Spirit during a week-end in a mountain chalet with a charismatic Episcopalian (Anglican) from the United States. This is a major reason why Chemin Neuf has always had a heart for Christian Unity.

I just want to share how the Catholic charismatic renewal began in South Korea. This story is quite remarkable. A Swedish Pentecostal woman, Ms Mirjam Knutas, was on holiday in the Canary Islands with her mother when she heard the Lord tell her to go to Korea to introduce the baptism in the Spirit to Catholics there. It seems that this probably happened before 1967. She knew no Catholics at all. After struggling with this word, she asked the Lord to confirm it by arranging for her to encounter a Catholic priest on her last day. She was preparing for bed without such an encounter when her mother felt ill and asked Mirjam to go for some medicine, and in the pharmacy there was a Catholic priest! So Ms Knutas went to Korea but then had to wait 5 years before anything happened. Then a Catholic man in the US military joined her Bible study group and was baptized in the Spirit. He then recommended a German missionary sister, Sr Erna Schmid, to visit Ms Knutas and this sister was baptized in the Spirit in January 1971. Within a month Sr Erna gathered a group of priests and brothers in the apartment of Ms Knutas and others received. Ms Knutas then arranged a Pentecost week-end in 1971 with Archer Torrey, an Episcopal priest, and grandson of a famous U. S. evangelist, as speaker for 16 people. This week-end is celebrated as the birth of the Catholic charismatic renewal in Korea.

- c. Those from different churches and confessions who received the baptism in the Spirit experienced a real unity in the spirit between them. This spiritual unity made possible a profound encounter in prayer together. In consequence, charismatic Christians have an inner witness of the Holy Spirit to the truth first made by John XXIII and repeated by John Paul II that "What unites us is much greater than what divides us"¹.

Examining the worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the 20th century, we can recognize distinct streams and currents, which nonetheless all share the basic grace of baptism in the Spirit and the restoration of the spiritual gifts. There is first, the Pentecostal movement, and then from the 1950s the charismatic movement, the latter being found in the major Christian churches and also in independent settings outside the churches. The Catholic charismatic renewal is not and should not attempt to be a separate movement without any inner connection to the wider Pentecostal and charismatic movements. The Catholic Renewal is that part of the charismatic movement that is not only within the communion of the Catholic Church, but is also particularly committed to its renewal in and through the Holy Spirit. So in my view it should have a Catholic identity that is more intensive within the wider and more general Christian identity of the whole

¹ *Ut Unum Sint*, para. 20.

movement. I will add some comments on the renewal of Catholic and Christian identity in the second talk.

Two major events that demonstrated the spiritual identity of the charismatic movement as a whole were the Kansas City conference in the USA that gathered 55,000 people in the summer of 1977, and the Pentecost over Europe conference held with 20,000 people in Strasbourg in 1982. A wide range of Christian confessions were represented at both gatherings, and both included Messianic Jews.²

2. The Charismatic and the Institutional

As Mary Healy and I worked on the ICCRS document on Baptism in the Holy Spirit, we realized from the start that Bl John Paul II's address to the new ecclesial movements and new communities at Pentecost 1998 was very foundational. "Whenever the Spirit intervenes, he leaves people astonished. He brings about events of amazing newness; he radically changes persons and history." This has been the experience of the Holy Spirit in the Renewal. But the Pope was not specifically referring to the Renewal, he was talking about Vatican Two! "This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council during which, under the guidance of the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements".

In this address. John Paul II formulated more clearly than any Pope before him that "The institutional and charismatic aspects are co-essential as it were to the Church's constitution. They contribute, although differently, to the life, renewal and sanctification of God's People." So the Pope was saying that the charismatic dimension was rediscovered at Vatican Two; it was present before but not adequately articulated and appreciated.³

Reflecting on this papal teaching, Mary Healy and I have presented baptism in the Spirit as belonging to the charismatic dimension of the Church: "Baptism in the Spirit, as a manifestation of the spontaneous working of the Spirit, belongs to the charismatic dimension, but at the same time it brings new life and dynamism to the institutional dimension grounded in the sacraments." (III, 4). Here we need to reflect a little on the main characteristics of the institutional and of the charismatic. The institutional at its heart is what is always present in every age of the Church, what is guaranteed in some way to be present until the Lord comes. The institutional is then above all Word and sacrament, together with the essential ministerial structure of the Church. It is a mistake to confuse the institutional with the bureaucratic. By contrast, the charismatic dimension is totally unpredictable, it comes and it goes as the Holy Spirit gives and leads. The institutional needs the charismatic, and the charismatic needs the institutional. In fact,

² Among the denominational tracks at Kansas City, there was a track for Messianic Jews. In France, some know the ministry of Reuven Berger, a Messianic Jewish teacher from Jerusalem, who was present at Strasbourg.

³ Cardinal Suenens had pointed out at the Council that « the charismatic dimension was necessary to the Church" (A New Pentecost?, p. 40).

the charismatic is poured out into and upon the Church of history, as the Lord of history sees fit.

Baptism in the Spirit being essentially charismatic has many implications which were not drawn out in the ICCRS document. Let me attempt now to indicate some of them and relate them to the issue of ecumenism.

First, recognising baptism in the Spirit as a charismatic grace frees us from the unsatisfactory process of trying to say that what we have experienced as baptism in the Spirit was always present in the life of the Church. I suggest that this makes it an irrelevant question to ask if St Francis of Assisi was baptized in the Spirit in the sense of the Renewal today. St Francis was the key figure in a different and distinctive charismatic outpouring of the Spirit at another period in the Church's history.

Second, I suggest that there is a direct spiritual connection between the Church's rediscovery of the charismatic dimension at the Council and the Council's "Yes" to a full participation of the Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement. The ecumenical opening of the Church at Vatican Two was itself a charismatic grace. The efforts to try and prove that the Church was always ecumenical in the sense that Vatican Two teaches are futile. Yes, of course authentic ecumenism just as authentic charismatic renewal has a foundation in the biblical revelation and in the person of Jesus, but let us not try to pretend that they were always there in every century! The same point can be made of the opening to the Jewish people at Vatican Two, that is more closely linked to the renewal of the Church than most Catholics have realized.

Third, until this recent recognition of the charismatic element, I do not think the Catholic Church had the necessary conceptual tools to reflect theologically on the unprecedented breaking out in her midst or on the Church's preparation for the climax of history in the Lord's coming in glory - which has to be a totally charismatic event, for the Lord says that we cannot know the day nor the hour. Recognising the nature of the charismatic as unpredictable, and not therefore previously present in that form, the charismatic represents a major way in which the Lord moves the Church through the necessary preparation for the parousia and the fullness of the Kingdom.

Now let us come back to the idea that the ecumenical movement is essentially a charismatic grace poured out by the Lord at this moment in the history of the Church. Was the ecumenical movement totally unexpected? I would say Yes, it was not expected that the whole Catholic Church would so suddenly move from no official or very minimal ecumenical involvement to official endorsement within the space of the Council. Yes, there were ecumenical pioneer figures, who prepared the way, but they were charismatic precursors in the sense in which John Paul II used the term. In a similar way the Council's recognition for the first time in Catholic history that God has not rejected the Jewish people and that they remain the people of the covenant can be understood as a charismatic grace at this point in history. To see the ecumenical movement and the

Council's teaching on the Jews as charismatic graces of the Lord may provide the deepest answer to the doctrinal objections of the Society of St Pius X that ecumenism and the teaching on the Jews are heretical. They were certainly not traditional, which for SSPX means heresy, but their position allows no place for the charismatic.

If the ecumenical movement is a charismatic grace of the Spirit, that underlines the affinity that ought to exist between the ecumenical movement and the charismatic movement. Maybe future historians will see these two movements of the Spirit as defining characteristics of the twentieth century.

3. Why Have These Movements Related So Little?

When we realize how the beginnings of the Renewal engendered great ecumenical enthusiasm, it is truly puzzling why with a very few exceptions there was so little interest in the charismatic movement among ecumenists⁴ and why charismatic Christians were not very active in the ecumenical movement. In the first years, there were some signs this might not happen. In France, there was a remarkable colloquy held in Viviers in November 1973, under the presidency of Thomas Roberts, that brought together for a *Rencontre Charismatique Interconfessionnelle* an impressive group of pastors and scholars: 60 or so pastors from the ERF, 15 from Switzerland with an official delegate from the Pastors of Geneva, some 40 priests including Dominicans, Jesuits, Benedictines and Trappists, representatives of the Protestant communities of Sisters, with some Lutherans and Baptists, and several impacted by the Renewal including Fr Laurent. Pastor Georges Appia, an official of the ERF, wrote: "Nous étions donc là en présence d'une manifestation d'unité chrétienne vécue comme on en a peu d'exemples aujourd'hui, même dans les situations les plus favorables. Que ce soit dans l'étude, la prière, la louange, la réflexion en groupes de travail, la transparence et l'unanimité étaient surprenantes entre tous les participants. »⁵

From the ecumenical side, it is important to understand that at the completion of Vatican Two in 1965, there were very few people with any ecumenical experience in the Catholic Church, and this includes the bishops. Consequently there was strong agreement that ecumenical developments should follow norms drawn up by the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting the Unity of Christians (later the Pontifical Council) under the close guidance of the bishops. The greater part of Catholic ecumenical participation was either in theological dialogues involving approved theologians or in local cooperation guided by diocesan and national ecumenical commissions. It will be clear from this description that the inter-denominational patterns of the Renewal did not fit into this view of ecumenism. The Renewal appeared to present "un oecuménisme sauvage" that lacked all order and a clear orientation to church unity. In general, ecumenists did not take seriously the spiritual unity created by the Holy Spirit, and if they adverted to it, they tended to dismiss it as merely emotional.

⁴ One notable exception was Fr Kilian McDonnell, osb.

⁵ *Viviers 1973: Rencontre Charismatique Interconfessionnelle 31 oct. - 4 nov. 1973*, p. 4.

Here there may have been a theological failure in the Catholic Renewal. The spiritual unity genuinely experienced by charismatic Christians from different confessions was never adequately articulated. This task remains today. I see the Holy Spirit creating a real spiritual unity among separated Christians, which then has to become the springboard for a unity in understanding that we do not yet have. But with our received body-soul distinction, no spiritual unity can be recognized, which is one reason it is dismissed as merely emotional.

On the charismatic side, there were various reasons. One was the emergence of “non-denominational” charismatic groupings that in no way shared a vision for an ecclesial ecumenism, and which frequently saw the immediate spiritual unity as the only real unity and regarded the Churches as lifeless institutions. Their ideal was often that people should leave their churches and join the new “non-denominational” bodies. So the two main books by Catholics on Charismatic Renewal and Ecumenism sought to provide a clear distinction between what is ecumenical and what is non-denominational.⁶ Often Protestant charismatics from mainline denominations did not share an ecclesial vision for Renewal that characterized the Catholic Renewal. This produced a blurred picture that did not correspond to the “church meets church (or ecclesial community)” model embraced by Catholic ecumenism.

At the same time, the Catholic Renewal was wanting to have full ecclesiastical approval and to contribute to the life of the Catholic Church. It was Pope Paul VI who asked Cardinal Suenens to help the Renewal to be truly integrated into Catholic life. From the side of the Renewal, there was talk in the early 1980s of moving or bringing the Renewal to the heart of the Church. As part of this, the international office was moved from Brussels to Rome. The result was that the ecumenical dimension of the Renewal was de-emphasized and there was even talk in the late 1980s of restrictions on Catholics taking part in big inter-denominational meetings. Fortunately, this never happened and Catholics were able to play a full part in the Brighton conference of 1991, at which there was a significant French presence, including the future Bishop Santier and Père Laurent.

Further, the forms of ecumenism that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s were not very attractive to many charismatic Christians, being either very intellectual and theological, or being active locally, but rarely manifesting a strong spiritual dimension. Despite the Council’s clear endorsement of the spiritual ecumenism of the Abbé Couturier in paras. 6 - 8 at the heart of the Decree on Ecumenism, these principles were not emphasized and made central in the first 30 years of Catholic ecumenical activity. There were of course exceptions, one of which is the role of the Taizé community, another the lesser-known Bosé community in NW Italy. There appeared to be little scope for the exercise of the charisms and the distinctive features of the Renewal.

⁶ Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens, *Ecumenism and Charismatic Renewal* (1978), Kilian McDonnell, osb *The Charismatic Renewal and Ecumenism*

Perhaps the clearest indication of a real disconnect between the two movements is the total lack of any reference to the charismatic renewal, to ecumenical communities and prayer groups within the Renewal, in the revised Ecumenical Directory published by the Pontifical Council for Unity in 1993. This is particularly astonishing for Section IV on “Communion of Life and Spiritual Activity among the Baptized”.

4. A Changing Scene

Since 1995, we can see major changes affecting ecumenical thinking on Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity and spiritual ecumenism. I want to list three factors.

First, a major development among ecumenical leaders, especially in the World Council of Churches. By the mid-1990s an increasing number of Christians committed to Christian unity were concerned about the diminishing credibility of the ecumenical movement and its lack of appeal to the younger generation. There was the feeling that ecumenism lacked dynamic vision and that the movement gave the impression of being as bureaucratic as the denominations it hoped to inspire and renew. The lack of credibility came above all from the fast-growing segment of Evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic Christians, most of whom wanted nothing to do with official ecumenism. As a result the percentage of Christians belonging to churches and denominations that were part of the World Council of Churches was getting lower, down perhaps to 50%. Some key officials at the World Council in Geneva realized that a new initiative was needed to reach out to the Evangelicals and Pentecostals that would be outside all the existing ecumenical structures. Ten years of assiduous building of bridges and holding of regional consultations led to the birth in 2007 of the Global Christian Forum, bringing together Christian leaders from all traditions and streams, ensuring that at least half the participation would be from Evangelical and Pentecostal movements. A totally new approach was used at the first Global Assembly of the new Forum in Limuru, Kenya in 2007. No titles were to be used. The delegates formed groups of twenty people or so, and they began by sharing who Jesus Christ is for them. The two major addresses were given by Pentecostal scholars: Wonsuk Ma (Korea) and Cheryl Bridges Johns (USA). The Limuru meeting opened up new channels of communication, and there was virtually unanimous support that the process should continue. It is too early to say what the long-term implications will be and the direction that it might take, but clearly in some way an ecumenical logjam has been broken.

A second major development with potentially major ecumenical fruit is the emergence in the worldwide Pentecostal movement of serious scholarship (theological, exegetical and historical) that is interacting with other Christian scholars. As a result, the deep suspicion of ecumenism among Pentecostals, seeing it as a merely human effort to counteract inevitable decline, is giving way to more ecumenical attitudes, and among some to a deep ecumenical commitment. At present, this tendency is found in academic and educational circles much more than in denominational leadership. It is more advanced in North America, where the Society for Pentecostal Studies now has an Ecumenical Interest Group that is accepted as a perfectly normal development, but it is also present for example in Asia and in Latin America, where a Pentecostal theologian from Chile was invited to the CELAM conference in Brazil in 2006.

The third factor is the remarkable encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* of Bl. John Paul II (1995). I will refer to some points from *Ut Unum Sint* in my second talk. But the important point here is the rehabilitation of spiritual ecumenism and placing it once again at the centre (from para. 15). We can interpret this emphasis as John Paul correcting the direction of

the ecumenical movement, though he does not express this emphasis as a criticism. One of the longest sections in the encyclical is entitled “The Primacy of Prayer” (paras. 21 - 27). This goes much further than Vatican Two, which was much more cautious, since at that time Catholics had minimal experience of common prayer with other Christians. But in UUS, there is a boldness, a confidence in the Holy Spirit, that was a hallmark of John Paul II. “Love is the great undercurrent which gives life and adds vigour to the movement towards unity. This love finds its most complete expression in common prayer.” (para. 21). In fact the Pope is quite lyrical about the experience of common prayer: “Along the ecumenical path to unity, pride of place certainly belongs to common prayer, the prayerful union of those who gather together around Christ himself. If Christians, despite their divisions, can grow ever more united in common prayer around Christ, they will grow in the awareness of how little divides them in comparison to what unites them.” (para. 22). That this is not recommending a cosy huddle is clear from what follows: “If they meet more often and more regularly before Christ in prayer, they will be able to gain the courage to face all the painful human reality of their divisions”, and they will find themselves together once more in that community of the Church which Christ constantly builds up in the Holy Spirit, in spite of all weaknesses and human limitations.” (para. 22).