

Chemin Neuf Assemblée Générale August 2012

Talk 2 on Charismatic Ecumenism

In this second talk, I want to present what I see to be the key elements in a charismatic ecumenism. But by way of introduction, I want to say something about our church identity and our Christian identity. This affects all Christians, but it is an especially important issue for Catholics, as it is a major concern of church authorities to preserve and deepen the Catholic identity of their people. As a result, many Catholics feel a tension between being Catholic and being ecumenical.

It is clear from the teaching of Bl. John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* that today to be Catholic is to be ecumenical. Today to marginalize the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church is to be less Catholic, not more Catholic. What needs to be made clear is that the conciliar renewal requires a renewal in how we understand and live Catholic identity. For all Christians, this is a requirement of fidelity to the Lord whom all confess. After the Protestant Reformation, when divisions and attitudes hardened, our church/confessional identities became increasingly defined by where we disagree, that is by what we are against. So to be a loyal Catholic means to be anti-Protestant and vice versa. To be a true Catholic meant emphasizing Catholic teaching that the Protestants rejected: Eucharistic sacrifice, devotion to Mary and the Saints, the authority of the Pope.

Today the renewal of our identities means that we reshape our identities so that they are not defined by what we are against, but what we are for. This does not mean abandoning our distinctive tenets, but presenting them in relation to the centre, Jesus Christ, and in the light of the biblical revelation. As our identities are renewed in this way - and it is an ongoing process - there will be an increasing coming together of our church and our Christian identities.

The Key Elements in a Charismatic Ecumenism

The key elements in a charismatic ecumenism flow directly from the character of baptism in the Spirit. In other words, developing a charismatic ecumenism is primarily introducing the defining hallmarks of baptism in the Spirit into ecumenical relationships and meetings. But first I want to note how the grace of the Renewal opens up radically new possibility on the way of Christian reconciliation.

Through the baptism in the Spirit, the faithful are enabled to hear the voice of the Lord and their mouths are opened to express the praises of God and to share what the Lord is saying to them. These two elements together can transform ecumenical relationships. Together we can seek the Lord's priorities, the Lord's way forward, and we expect that the Lord will speak - as ever in a wide variety of ways - through whomever He chooses, often several people so that only through listening to all does the Lord's will become clear. Seeking the Lord's will in this way is important for all Christians in every situation, but in the work of Christian unity it is especially important because the authentic road, the Holy Spirit's road, to Christian unity has never been trod before.

1. Praise and Worship

Declaring the praise of the Lord when we begin any meeting recognizes the proper relationship between us as creatures and God as our Creator. It places us in the right position to hear the Word of the Lord as word from the Lord. Declaring the victory of

Jesus on the cross and in his resurrection from the dead recognizes our position as sinners always in need of the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. Praising God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church recognizes the Church's constant need to receive all life afresh from the Spirit and the need to be led by the Holy Spirit. This dependence on the Holy Spirit is all the more necessary when the goal of the encounters is to promote Christian unity, for this is really a road not travelled before.

2. The Role of the Word of God

In a charismatic ecumenism, a primary place will be given to the Scriptures as the Word of God. The Word of God should not just be the subject of academic discussions, but the focus of prayer and deep reflection together. Here I need to say that the Groupe des Dombes in France has pioneered this dimension of spiritual ecumenism. In a charismatic ecumenism, there will be a heightened expectation that the Holy Spirit will bring something from the Word of God that can shape the direction of the meeting.

Giving this role to the Word of God requires that time be given to listening to the Word, including time together with our ecumenical colleagues. I have several times had the experience of a group having to change its agenda and plans because of new directions received through listening to the Word of God. One was in TJCII. We met then twice a year and we had planned an international gathering in Jerusalem for September 2006. We had already arranged to go to Nairobi for the spring meeting in that year. But then we received a word that we were to go to Antioch before we went to Jerusalem, as the road to Jerusalem passes through Antioch. Many years ago Thomas Roberts had a parallel sense about Constantinople and Jerusalem.

3. Prayer of Faith in the Risen Lord who Acts Today

The praise of the Lord and listening to His Word needs to be followed by the prayer of faith, of faith in Jesus Christ as the living Lord who still acts in the world today. I have been at many ecumenical meetings over the years, and naturally all begin with prayer. But very often it seems that the prayer is said and the response is given in a way that suggests that no one present expects anything to be changed by the prayer. This is tragic, and it is directly linked to the experience of fatigue and boredom often experienced in routine ecumenical meeting.

It is the experience of praying with other Christians filled and led by the Spirit of God that demonstrates to us the most clearly that what unites is with them is so much more important than what divides.

4. Examination of Conscience

For John Paul II's teaching that ecumenical dialogue is also an examination of conscience to become a reality in ecumenical exchanges, there is needed an openness to the Holy Spirit who alone can convict us of our sin. For this reason, charismatic Christians are equipped through baptism in the Spirit for this role. The pope's teaching is based on the presence of three partners in every dialogue, the two groups of Christians and the Lord himself. For a real examination of conscience to take place, the listening to the Lord and hearing his voice is absolutely essential.

In my experience, it is the humble confession of the sinful behavior of Catholics in the past, and acknowledging the real weaknesses and failings, that deeply touches the hearts

of the other Christians and helps to remove their deep suspicions and reservations which often remain behind the outer ecumenical politeness. In this openness to confession of our sins and weaknesses, we have the directly opposite policy (and remedy) to the pre-ecumenical triumphalism that proclaimed the weaknesses and errors of the others while presenting one's own history in a totally favourable light. Here we have to overcome the fear that saying bad things about our Church instead of good things is giving a bad witness. The fear often comes out of a lack of experience of Christian from different confessions really accepting one another in love and trust. Acknowledging the sinful things in our heritage is not denying at all the great works of God in our past. But it is helping to remove an obstacle to reception of our positive witness. Moreover confessing the evils in our past is an act of purification that enables the real works of God to be seen for what they are, that is obscured by partisan propaganda that pretends that everything was always wonderful.

5. Recognition of Spiritual Forces of Evil

Another consequence of baptism in the Spirit is the recognition that other spirits are active besides the Holy Spirit. The Renewal has given rise to many ministries of deliverance. Much of this has been focused on the deliverance of individuals from various forms of oppression. But there is an awakened awareness too of the reality of evil powers at the corporate level. The front-runners in this area seem to have been some free church charismatic leaders engaged in evangelism. Being very pragmatic in their approach, they discovered that some cities and regions were much more difficult to evangelize than others. They attributed the difference to evil spirits having a power over the places resistant to evangelism because of past evils committed there. Out of this came an approach called "spiritual mapping" - promoted in some circles of YWAM, for example - whereby people researched the spiritual-moral history of these evangelism-resistant areas.

I mention this point because it would seem clear that evil spirits have played a role in Christian divisions, both in originating them and in perpetuating them. It seems very probable that the slow progress in the ecumenical movement and often the lack of serious desire for unity in the churches is because the spiritual forces in the divisions have not been adequately recognized and addressed. That should suggest that ecumenical activities aimed at overcoming the divisions need to pay attention to what we may call the spiritual dynamic of division and should be open to the positive elements in these Evangelical charismatic developments - in my view the identification of the spiritual roots of each separatist movement. There needs to be discussion on how to counter these spiritual influences in the power of the Spirit. The spiritual descendants can confess a major sin in their spiritual ancestors, and recognize how they have internalized this in their confessional history.

6. Charisms

The spiritual gifts are a significant fruit of baptism in the Spirit. In the New Testament, the charisms are endowments that equip the Church to fulfill her mission. They are not simply individual graces that characterize the life of the most saintly. Not using these gifts in the work for Christian unity is depriving ourselves of a vital tool. The charisms are gifts for the body of Christ. "Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." (1 Cor. 1: 7).

The gift of prophecy is the speaking forth of God's mind and heart for whatever people and situations that are being addressed. It is especially a gift of encouragement that raises our minds from merely earthly perspectives to see the present and the future as God sees

them. Prophetic words summoning the Churches to unity reveal something of the depths of the heart of Jesus and the intensity of Trinitarian communion. For there is a lethargy, a tiredness, a disappointment in many ecumenical circles. At the great Kansas City conference of 1977, a prophetic word was given, of which I cite only extracts: “Mourn and weep, for the body of my Son is broken. Come before Me with broken hearts and contrite spirits, for the body of my Son is broken. Turn from the sins of your fathers. Walk in the ways of My Son. Return to the plan of your Father, return to the purpose of your God. The body of My Son is broken.”

The gifts of healing are highly relevant too, because our divisions are a form of sickness that has wounded the body of Christ. The prophet Jeremiah reproached the people of Israel: “From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious.” (Jer. 6: 13 - 14). Is this a word that applies to the approach of divided Christian churches to ecumenism? Are we so accustomed to our divisions and to defending our Church that we have accepted division as normal?

The prayer of tongues can be of great value in the ecumenical context as through it we can express something from God that goes beyond what our minds are yet able to formulate. It can be a way we let the Holy Spirit express the Lord’s longing for unity: “for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.” (Rom. 8: 26).

7. Recovering Eschatology in the Ecumenical Task

A charismatic ecumenism will bring eschatology to the heart of Christian reconciliation. The spiritual dynamic of the Holy Spirit outpourings of the 20th century has produced an intensified hope for the coming of the Lord in glory. This was particularly evident in the origins of the Pentecostal movement, when the key slogans were “Pentecost Has Come” and “He is coming soon”. It has been present in the charismatic movement, though probably least strongly in the Catholic charismatic renewal. Is this because a focus on the second coming of the Lord is inherently deviant or does this expose one of our weaknesses that the Lord wants to deal with?

When the first Christians prayed “Marana tha! Come, Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 16: 22; Rev. 22: 20) and were taught that “The Spirit and the Bride say ‘Come’” (Rev. 22: 17), we cannot say that a focus on the coming of the Lord is deviant. In fact, there is as much about the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory in the New Testament as there is on any other topic. It is also one of the most remarkable fruits of the biblical and liturgical renewal in the 20th century Catholic Church that the Catechism of the Catholic Church has some remarkable statements about the Church’s orientation to the second coming, especially in her liturgy:

“The Holy Spirit’s transforming power in the liturgy hastens the coming of the kingdom and the consummation of the mystery of salvation.” (para. 1107).

“Since the apostolic age the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit’s groaning in the Church: *Marana tha!*” (para. 1130).

An awakening of the “blessed hope” (Tit. 2: 13), that a longing for the Lord to come in glory, is an element in baptism in the Spirit. In France, it was strongly present in the Pentecostal or charismatic revival movement within the Reformed Church in the Ardèche in the 1930s that led to the formation of the Union de Prière de Charmes. This dimension of the Renewal brings to life the teaching of St Paul that the “gift of the Spirit” is a gift of

“first-fruits” that causes us to “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom. 8: 23).¹

There is one hope that the Holy Spirit awakens in all Christian traditions. It is the one Holy Spirit who is at work in all our confessions who teaches the Church to cry “Marana tha! Come, Lord Jesus!”. There is only one coming Lord, only one coming Kingdom, only one Bride. “There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called” (Eph. 4: 4). The recovery of this hope and its being given a central place in ecumenical prayer and theology will correct a major imbalance in the ecumenical movement, which has had a far bigger focus on the past than on the future. For eschatology has been largely an absent theme in ecumenical debate.

In fact, it will be recovering for the Church the balance in the “hope of Israel” (Acts 28: 20), between looking back to the foundational events with God’s promises and looking forward to the full realization of the Messianic hope. The Holy Spirit transforms the Church from a backward-looking body to one that is always reaching for the future that the Holy Spirit is unfolding and longing for the final completion when Jesus comes in glory.

8. The Issue of Israel and Unity

I have been convinced of the ecumenical character of the Renewal from my first involvement in 1971. It was only with the Kansas City conference of 1977 that I first heard of the existence of Messianic Jews, who insisted on retaining a Jewish character and identity after coming to faith in Jesus, or as they would say Yeshua. I was led to understand the importance of Israel for the unity of the Church from my contacts with the Union de Prière de Charmes to whom I was introduced by a member of Chemin Neuf.

Briefly, the importance of the Jewish people for Christian unity is made most clear in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Here the fundamental reconciliation effected by the Cross is between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2: 14 - 18) and the unity of the Church is made possible by the entry of Gentiles, non-Jews, into the “commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2: 12) to become “fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.” (Eph. 2: 19). In the next chapter, the inclusion of the Gentiles is described as “the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3: 4 - 6). In this perspective, the first division in the history of the Church is the division between the Church and the synagogue.

As I came to understand these matters better, I was reminded of debates and articles at the time of Vatican Two and the drafting of the Decree on Ecumenism. In 1960, a leading French Jew, M. Jules Isaac, had an audience with Pope John XXIII in which he asked that the Catholic Church review the long history of “the theology of contempt” for the Jewish people. Pope John agreed, and entrusted the newly-formed Secretariat for Promoting the Unity of Christians with this task. So the first draft of the Decree on Ecumenism contained 5 chapters: the first 3 that continued into the final document, a Ch 4 on the Jewish People and Ch 5 on Religious Liberty. There was ferocious opposition from a minority against any positive statement about the Jews. In fact, there were 3 major pressure groups doing all they could to block this: 1. The Middle Eastern Arab bishops; 2. The Islamic governments with diplomatic relations with the Holy See; 3. The ultra-traditionalist group led by Archbishop Lefebvre. The Council always sought to preserve unity and to seek consensus rather than have a majority outvote a significant minority. So the statement on the Jews was placed in the decree on Non-Christian Religions with the agreement that it would also

¹ This teaching is also illustrated in 2 Cor. 1: 22; 5: 1 - 5; Eph. 1: 13 - 14; Eph. 4: 30.

say something about Islam, and the chapter on religious liberty became a separate declaration.

While the decree *Nostra Aetate* was a milestone in Jewish-Christian relations, especially with its repudiation of the idea that God had rejected the Jews and that the Church replaced Israel as God's people, the great loss in this political manoeuvre was the connection between Israel and Christian Unity. Nonetheless, *Nostra Aetate*'s recognition that the Jewish people remain the covenant people chosen by the Lord (expressed in the Church's intercession in the Good Friday liturgy) implicitly affirms the permanent connection between Israel and the Church. If Israel is still the covenant people, and the Church has been drawn into this covenant relationship, then there is a profound inner relationship between the two. The anomaly of Jews who do not believe in Jesus but who are still somehow within the covenant is similar in some way to the anomaly of Christian division.

The Role of the Renewal

What can all those who have been so blessed in the Renewal do to move forward Christian reconciliation and unity? Obviously we cannot impose charismatic ways upon fellow Christians who bring other gifts and do not share our style. But charismatic Christians can take the lead in ecumenical relations in emphasizing the centrality of spiritual ecumenism and in raising the issues developed by John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*. We can work to give a greater place to prayer, worship and Scripture in ecumenical meetings. We can raise the issue of ecumenical encounter as an examination of conscience.

Alongside wider ecumenical involvement, we can develop and deepen relations with other Christians who have been baptized in the Spirit. In some countries there have been charismatic leaders conferences: USA, Britain, Germany (for a time CCOF in France). We can work with Renewal groupings in other church communities. We can develop relations with Pentecostals. In the Netherlands there has been a dialogue for a few years between the Pentecostal churches and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. These initiatives need to be communicated to the ecumenical bodies in each nation.

Second, I give the instance of the colloquy on baptism in the Spirit being organized by Chemin Neuf en Suisse for March 2013, with participation of Lutheran, Orthodox and Catholic theologians.

Third, there is the example of the Alpha course. While the purpose of the Alpha course is evangelization, and its aim is not directly ecumenical, it can be seen as a major initiative favouring Christian unity. Nicky Gumbel has deliberately deepened his understanding of the Catholic Church so as better to promote Alpha among Catholics. In January this year I heard Nicky say that the biggest growth in Alpha courses in the world today is among Catholics. And he was very encouraged by a visit to Rome during which he met heads of several departments of the Roman Curia. Alpha helps to demonstrate and make real the truth that what unites is more basic than what divides.

But most importantly, there is enormous scope for spiritual initiatives developing from friendships and contacts across church borders. From the friendship in the 1890s between the Abbé Fernard Portal and the Anglican Lord Halifax, there have been many examples of ecumenical initiatives arising from deep friendships between officially divided Christians. The apostolate of the Abbé Couturier was one of friendship.