

Talk 2: Gdynia

Revival and Renewal Movements: 2. Renewal in the Historic Churches

See my books *The Strategy of the Spirit?* (1996), Ch. 9 – 10 and *Church Forward* (2007).

Peter Hocken, “The Impact of the Charismatic Movement on the Roman Catholic Church”, *Journal of Beliefs and Values* (Aug. 2004), pp.205 – 216.

Renewal is a term that entered strongly into Catholic terminology with the Second Vatican Council. Renewal currents had long existed in the Catholic Church, but renewal was at the heart of Pope John XXIII’s vision for the Council. What was new at Vatican Two was the official recognition that the Church is always in need of renewal. It was significant that this was first clearly enunciated in the Council’s Decree on Ecumenism: “Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth.” (para. 6). I see this as a recognition over four hundred years later of the validity of the Reformation axiom: “*Ecclesia semper reformanda*” [The Church always needs to be reformed] with the added dimension that the Church has a divine and a human dimension.

In contrast to the term revival, the term renewal primarily concerns the renewal of church life at the communal level. It is a more ecclesial concept than revival, which is why Catholics called the charismatic movement in the Catholic Church charismatic renewal.¹ So from CCR’s start in 1967, the Catholics baptized in the Spirit understood that this outpouring of the Spirit was for the Renewal of the whole Church. They quickly understood the gift of the charismatic renewal as a fruit of Vatican Two. They often recalled a prayer that Pope John XXIII composed for use during the 3 plus years of preparation for the Council that begged the Lord to pour out the Holy Spirit “as at a new Pentecost”.

Renewal currents in this sense have always existed in the Catholic Church, but there are some new patterns in the 20th century. The charismatic movement manifests elements of revival and of renewal. The renewal aspect of CR is especially seen in the reappearance of the charisms, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is different from earlier revivals. The Pentecostals had already understood that the restoration of the gifts of the Spirit was for the building up of the body, understood particularly as the local church. The teaching of Paul, especially in 1 Cor. 12 – 14, emphasizes that

¹ As many of you will probably know, the move of the Spirit associated with the Toronto Airport Church from 1994 was called a renewal by them. This is a different usage, which seems less appropriate, as it belongs more to a revivalistic pattern that is focused on individuals being impacted by the Spirit. They called it a renewal because it seemed that it was bringing refreshment (another word used) to many Christians who were already converted, rather than leading to many new conversions.

the gifts are given not just to individuals for their own benefit, but to believers as members of one body for the building up of the body. Charismatic Catholics have often for apologetic reasons pointed to the existence of the charisms, especially in the lives of recognized saints and holy people, throughout the 20 centuries of church history. These observations are historically correct, but they can easily overlook the genuinely new elements in the reappearance of the charisms in the 20th century:

1. the charisms are now understood as gifts for the Church, and as part of the necessary equipment of the Church to carry out her ministry and not just as a privilege of the few;
2. no one individual receives all the charisms, but all the necessary charisms are given to the church community as body;
3. they are now being given to ordinary Christians and not only to people of exceptional holiness; often too given early in the Christian lives and not primarily as a consequence of a long process of spiritual testing and growth.

What does renewal of the Church mean?

It means re-centring all Church life on the core/heart of Christian faith, the mystery of Christ which is the eternal plan of God for deliverance-salvation and for sanctification-glorification of all creation with its focal point in the human person and human society.

As such, the word “renewal” is applicable to all existing churches/denominations, and not just to the Catholic Church. Renewal in the sense described is sought and found mostly in those churches with a sense of the Church as an instrument of salvation. This means especially the churches with liturgical patterns of worship (and often with episcopal forms of government). Thus the liturgical movement for the renewal of corporate liturgy, which effectively began in the Catholic Church in Belgium in 1908 later had a considerable influence in the Anglican communion and among many Lutherans.

The Church Reception of the Charismatic Movement

When renewal is understood as a renewal of the Church as a body, then any renewal movement has to be concerned to influence the Church’s life and to win over the leadership to this vision. So with the beginning of the charismatic movement in the existing churches from the late 1950s and early 1960s the appearance of charismatic gifts and of charismatic groups in their midst produced various reactions from the church leadership.

In the Protestant Churches. With very few exceptions, the first reactions of the Protestant Churches to the charismatic movement focused on the phenomenon of speaking in tongues, often referred to as glossolalia. None welcomed it unreservedly. Most showed a great caution about tongues because of its

irrational character. Very few said it should be prohibited, but there was much focus on psychological studies. A few denominations repudiated anything outwardly charismatic, particularly the Church of the Nazarene and in practice the (Plymouth) Brethren. In the case of the Brethren, this was because of their belief that charismata belonged only to the beginnings of the Church and so by definition any claims to charisms today is fraudulent (cessationism). The Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) in the USA opposed the charismatic movement, but their opposition was especially to the word gifts, fearing that belief in contemporary prophecy would undermine the uniqueness of the biblical Word. The Southern Baptists in the USA refused to accept as missionary candidates anyone who spoke in tongues.

In general, the denominations with congregational forms of government had a harder time with the charismatic movement than those with episcopal forms. The reason is not hard to find. In the congregationalist-type churches, the appearance of charismatic gifts, and particularly when the pastor became charismatic, easily produced a crisis in the congregation with the necessity for a quick decision as to whether this was to be permitted. In the episcopal-type churches, the issue became known to the bishop and there was generally no need for a quick response. The Episcopal Bishop of Chicago set up a commission to investigate and the commission took about 3 years to report. By the time the movement spread in Europe, reports had already been received from the USA, and this took the heat out of the situation. Fewer Protestant pastors in Europe had a hard time with their church authorities than in the USA. Sometimes Baptist churches that turned charismatic subsequently left the Baptist Union and linked up with non-denominational church networks. In Eastern Europe, the Protestant denominations were slower to accept charismatic renewal than in Western Europe, when it largely reached the East after the fall of Communism. In Romania, for example, I know a pastor who had to leave the Baptists when he was baptized in the Spirit.

The Catholic Church. The way in which the charismatic movement broke out and then spread in the Catholic Church was different from the earlier pattern in the Protestant Churches.

1. It began primarily in a university setting (Notre Dame, Indiana; Duquesne, Pittsburgh, Pa; Michigan State, Lansing, Mi) among young graduates and students. As a result it never had the anti-intellectual bias of some revival currents in the Evangelical world.
2. CCR had a strong orientation to the renewal of the Church with a strong awareness of being a fruit of the Second Vatican Council. The first leaders were convinced it needed to be received by the leaders of the Church. Bishops were invited to conferences.
3. The response of the bishops was fairly quick and remarkably positive. Speaking in tongues was not an issue, and unlike the Protestant statements it does not take up much space in the official Catholic statements on the renewal. I think this was because Catholics have always been accustomed to supernatural manifestations. So discernment was urged, but without any sense of major danger. If there was one aspect that concerned the Vatican and the bishops, it was ecclesiology and ecumenism. They were concerned that the charismatic movement in the Catholic Church should be authentically Catholic and not a mishmash of bits of Catholicism, Protestantism and Pentecostalism. This raised the question of how one can truly learn from other Christian traditions while remaining faithful and properly rooted

in one's own heritage.

4. The popes were much more welcoming to the charismatic renewal than many bishops. The process of acceptance by the Popes was much aided by the role of the primate of Belgium, Cardinal Leo-Joseph Suenens (1904 – 96), who had been one of the major voices at the Second Vatican Council. When Suenens heard of the beginnings of the Catholic charismatic renewal from the United States, he sent a trusted priest to investigate and report. When the report was favourable, Suenens went himself to visit “high spots” of renewal, which also included an incognito visit to a renowned centre for renewal among the Episcopalians (Anglicans). Suenens convened a meeting of Catholic theologians involved in the renewal near Rome. Suenens had been reporting to Pope Paul VI. All this led to the International Conference, held since 1968 at Notre Dame, Indiana, being held in Rome in 1975. Over 20,000 people attended. On this occasion, thousands of charismatic Catholics sung in tongues in St Peter's basilica, and Paul VI addressed them, saying the renewal was “an opportunity for the Church”. From this point, all the Popes have strongly supported this Renewal. In the Catholic Church, when the Pope gives his blessing to a new movement, the local bishops cannot simply denounce it and reject it. Today the Catholic charismatic renewal is strongest in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and on these continents the bishops now are much more supportive than twenty years ago. Some bishops have been named from priests active in the Renewal movement.

The Anglican Communion: Among the communions stemming from the Protestant Reformation, the charismatic renewal has probably had the greatest impact in the Anglican communion. However, the forces of modernistic liberalism have been making inroads in all the historic Protestant communions including the Anglicans. So today the Anglican communion is in serious danger of splitting in two. The charismatic movement has had most influence in Africa and in Asia, where is where the strongest Anglican voices for traditional orthodox in faith and morals are being heard. In England, never a country to embrace extremes with enthusiasm, there is liberal theology, but few strident voices; and there have been strong charismatic currents. This is particularly evident from the success of the Alpha course, developed by Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, London, which has a restrained charismatic flavour (with a Holy Spirit week-end at which the possibility of receiving the gift of tongues is mentioned). Also in the New Wine network, founded by David Pyches, formerly the Anglican bishop in Chile., that holds enormous conferences each summer. There are now a few Anglican bishops in England, who have been active in charismatic renewal (Graham Dow, Graham Cray). In the USA, with more extreme liberal views dominating the College of Bishops, many charismatics have sought refuge in splinter Anglican groups connecting with bishops in Africa, Asia or Latin America, so that the renewal movement in the Episcopal Church has been weakened.

The Lutheran Churches. There is charismatic renewal throughout the Lutheran world. But it encounters different issues in the Lutheran context from the Anglican. The Lutheran tradition is both confessional and more theological. Lutheran charismatics often encounter the criticism that Luther opposed the charismatic in his day in his fierce rejection of the Anabaptists, emphasizing simply Word and sacrament. Germany has been the major home of biblical criticism, which has

contributed to more liberal theological tendencies, while the Scandinavian churches have become very secularized. In this context, the Lutheran charismatics are often an under-appreciated minority. However, in places like Tanzania, Ethiopia and Pakistan, where there have been Lutheran missions, charismatic renewal has thrived and flourished.

The Methodist Church. It is surprising considering the huge influence of John Wesley in the history of revival that the Methodist Church has not been leading the way in charismatic renewal. John Wesley was such a multi-talented knowledgeable man that the movement he led expressed all the many facets of the founder's life. But it is not surprising that after his death the movement was not able to hold all this richness and diversity together. By the mid-1800s, Wesley's emphasis on social righteousness and compassion for the poor had a prominent place in the Methodist churches. So that when a new focus on personal Holiness (sanctification) appeared, it did not find a ready welcome among the Methodists. This led to the formation of new Holiness denominations, which became one of the seed-grounds of the Pentecostal movement. This meant that mainline Methodism in the USA was inherently suspicious of Pentecostalism. However, the charismatic movement exists in the Methodist churches. As there has been renewed study of John Wesley, this aids Methodists to discover the more charismatic side of Wesley.

The Baptists. Here the congregational form of church government and the associational character of the Baptist Unions produce a different pattern. First, the associational pattern has led to a number of Baptist churches that turned charismatic choosing to leave the BU and to link up with new charismatic networks. Some in UK belong to such networks as Baptist congregations. In the USA, the biggest Baptist denomination, the Southern Baptists, has been consistently anti-charismatic making life difficult for pastors declaring a charismatic dimension to their lives. However, there are important Baptist congregations that are charismatic, like that of Lawrence Khong in Singapore.