

Another Moment of Opportunity: Jan. 31 - Feb. 1, 2012

Talk 1: Old and New, Tradition and Renewal

This talk comes right out of issues that I have been grappling with in recent months largely through documents and talks I have had to work on, especially the ICCRS document on baptism in the Spirit, but also two papers evaluating the new charismatic churches from a Catholic standpoint. It is the issue of the relationship between the new work of the Holy Spirit in the Renewal and the whole work of the Spirit throughout the centuries, the relationship between the new and original on the one hand and the Catholic tradition on the other hand. This paper is then more theological than maybe many of the talks you have heard. But I make no apology for this, because without vigorous theological reflection in faith, we will be condemned to rather superficial presentations of the Renewal.

But these issues do not arise simply from my recent tasks and activities. They reflect a major preoccupation of Pope Benedict, whose hallmark perhaps is the combination of theological rigour and renewal in faith. Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Benedict has been concerned with a proper understanding of the Second Vatican Council. So there is much talk about two contrasting hermeneutics of the Council: one a hermeneutics of continuity that sees renewal in continuity with the whole Catholic tradition and the other a hermeneutics of rupture that interprets the Council as a revolution discarding elements of tradition and exalting what is new. Obviously the Vatican is repudiating any interpretation of the Council as a revolutionary rupture with the past. Actually, I find Pope Benedict's own statements on this theme are deeper and more nuanced than those of some of his interpreters, also those close to home: for him, it is more a matter of a hermeneutics of renewal versus a hermeneutics of rupture. In other words, do you place the emphasis first on continuity or first on renewal?

Why do I bring this up here? First, because the experience of renewal, rooted in the gift of baptism in the Spirit, has something startling new about it. So the process of how to understand the Renewal and baptism in the Spirit as Catholics has been in effect a grappling with this issue of the new and the old, i.e. the question how this reality relates to the age-long celebration of baptism and confirmation as efficacious signs of the Spirit - life. It is clear and not the least surprising that the free church interpretation of this grace in the Pentecostal and new church movements will always opt for the newness at the expense of the received heritage. And on the other end of the spectrum, it is not surprising that Catholics are constantly tempted to whittle down the newness in order to stress the continuity and to argue that there is little or nothing that is really new: i.e. renewal as making more lively and effective what we have always had and have always known about.

Inevitably the ICCRS document on baptism in the Spirit that Mary Healy and I were working on for three years until its completion last September had to address this issue. However, I find I have been led more deeply into it since the main lines of the document were written. Nonetheless, I think the document really tries to express a balance in this tension between the new and the old. We inherited a situation in which the position clearly presented by Frs McDonnell and Montague in their book *Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation* was regarded almost as the Catholic position, namely that baptism in the Spirit is an actualization of the graces objectively conferred in the sacraments of initiation through their entry into our conscious experience. I was always very uncomfortable with this position - on various grounds, biblical, theological and ecumenical - and regarded as very sad the way that this theory was enthusiastically embraced and

propagated within the Catholic renewal. For I felt that to regard this position as a total and adequate understanding of baptism in the Holy Spirit did not do justice to what is most distinctive in the Renewal and contributes to a weakening in its spiritual power.

### The Institutional and the Charismatic

Mary Healy and I had the grace to grasp to some degree the importance for this issue of Pope John Paul II's Pentecost address to the new ecclesial movements and communities in 1998, in particular what he said about the institutional and the charismatic dimensions of the Church. This distinction of John Paul II enabled us to formulate the following as a key statement in the document: "The institutional is passed down from generation to generation and belongs to the permanent visible structure of the Church. The charismatic is given by the Lord in an unpredictable way and cannot be codified. 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 of Christian life grounded in the sacraments." (III. 4).

For me, since the document was completed I am seeing more and more the importance of this distinction of John Paul II, stimulated by being asked to speak on the document and by other tasks that have come my way. So I want now to say more about the institutional - charismatic distinction and how it can help us to uphold the particular grace of baptism in the Spirit while at the same time giving proper weight to the Church's teaching on the foundational character of the sacraments of initiation.

We have described the institutional element as that which is passed down from generation to generation and that belongs to the permanent visible structure of the Church. In fact, the basic structure of the Church is liturgical, but understanding here the essential role of the Scriptures in the liturgy. This is one of the great achievements of Vatican Two to see the liturgy as the Church in action and in the process of formation. "In the liturgy of the New Covenant every liturgical action, especially the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments, is an encounter between Christ and the Church. The liturgical assembly derives its unity from the 'communion of the Holy Spirit' who gathers the children of God into the one Body of Christ." (CCC, para. 1097). "The sacraments are 'of the Church' in the double sense that they are 'by her' and 'for her.' They are 'by the Church,' for she is the sacrament of Christ's action at work in her through the mission of the Holy Spirit. They are 'for the Church' in the sense that 'the sacraments make the Church,' since they manifest and communicate to men, above all in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the God who is love, One in three persons." (CCC, para. 1118). It is the liturgy of the new covenant that forms and builds the Church as the body of Christ, a body that then has continuous existence in history.

Often when we think of the Church as institution, we think of the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus of the Vatican, of episcopal conferences and diocesan curiae. But this is to exalt what is accessory to what is essential, and to make the secondary primary. The institution of the Church is what expresses her most fundamental structural character, what there has to be if there is to be Church at all. And this is liturgy - with Word and sacrament. The Scriptures also belong to the institutional permanent dimension of the Church. So in the underground church of China, there are no diocesan offices, no Ad Clerums, no marriage tribunals. But there is just liturgy with bishop and priests celebrating Word and sacrament. So there is Church.

Likewise we describe the charismatic dimension of the Church as what "is given by the Lord in an unpredictable way and cannot be codified". So in contrast to the institutional

elements, the charismatic elements come and go, they cannot be programmed or controlled. The charisms or spiritual gifts are obviously prime examples. But so are the origins of new communities or orders with their own distinctive founding charisms. All the charismatic initiatives of the Lord through the history of the Church are in some way sovereign acts of the sovereign Lord. By contrast, the order instituted by the Lord from the beginning is mediated through designated leaders and through designated acts that are commanded: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28: 19); “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11: 24).

But as John Paul II made clear in his Pentecost 1998 address, the institutional and the charismatic belong together: they are “almost co-essential to the configuration of the Church”. They need each other. The charismatic initiatives of the sovereign Lord are acts for and upon the historical body of Christ. When the charismatic is not rightly related to the institutional, the deep and lasting fruits will be weakened and are in danger of being merely ephemeral. But without the charismatic impulses and sovereign initiatives of the Lord, the institutional is in danger of becoming immobile, inflexible and fixed in the past.

John Paul II saw the charismatic element as having been restored to the Church through the Second Vatican Council. “The Spirit is always awesome whenever he intervenes. He arouses astonishing new events, he radically changes people and history. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican Council, during which, guided by the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as being essential to her identity.” Notice that what I am describing as sovereign initiatives of the Lord, the Pope was using other words to express the same reality: “awesome when he intervenes”, radical change. Note too that the Pope sees the charismatic dimension as always having been present in the Church, with one major new element being the Church’s understanding that this dimension is essential for the life of the Church. The charismatic dimension is not just an adjunct, a sideshow, an occasional bonus from on high. This teaching also recognizes the corporate role of the charismatic in the Church. This corrects the widespread assumption that the charismatic elements appeared from time to time in the lives of the most holy people primarily as signs of individual holiness.

The charismatic dimension always serves as a reminder to the Church and all her members that all in the Church is grace, all has to be continually received afresh from the Father. This is as true of what is covenantally guaranteed in the Word of God and the sacraments as it is of unexpected and uncovenanted graces and blessings. But the charismatic experience reminds us that everything including the guaranteed is grace from on high.

#### Application to Baptism in the Spirit and the Renewal

In the ICCRS document, we say: “Baptism in the Spirit, as a manifestation of the spontaneous working of the Spirit, belongs to the charismatic dimension”. We also emphasize its character as a sovereign act of the Lord, that could not have been foreseen and that broke out upon the Church as a great surprise of the Spirit. I am convinced that this corresponds to the experience of those brought by the grace of baptism in the Spirit into the charismatic renewal. The explanation that it is simply what we received as babies or infants at baptism entering into our conscious experience just does not do justice to the genuine newness of baptism in the Spirit as a sovereign work of the Lord in our day.

The sovereign unforeseeable character of the work of God in this Pentecostal outpouring means that it is in God’s providence something for the Church in our day at this point in history. As a charismatic gifting it is not simply something that has been happening and

available in every generation. It is not just a grace for particular individuals. This perspective means that it is not helpful to make statements about great saints of the past being baptized in the Spirit. Yes, the great saints of the past were recipients of charismatic graces, including blessings not given to us, but they were not blessed with the specific grace of charismatic renewal in all its ecclesial contours such as the restoration of the whole range of spiritual gifts or charisms listed in 1 Corinthians 12: 8 - 10.

But does this mean that the attempt to relate the grace of baptism in the Spirit to the sacraments of initiation is mistaken? No, it doesn't. For as the charismatic is poured out to be received into the ongoing historical body of Christ, so this grace of baptism in the Spirit in the twentieth century is poured out on the body of believers established through the full liturgy of Christian initiation in baptism, confirmation and first communion. So, it is true, as our ICCRS document acknowledges, that the grace of baptism in the Spirit does infuse new life into those first brought to new life through the liturgies of initiation. It does give a new love for the sacraments, it does deepen our sense of being sons and daughters of the Father, a status we received at baptism. In fact, what I am saying here of baptism in the Spirit is true of every unexpected charismatic grace in the history of the Church: all are poured out on baptized persons, on communities established on and formed by the Word of God and the sacraments; and all enhance and deepen the foundational life of sonship in Trinitarian communion.

But the recognition that baptism in the Spirit belongs to the charismatic dimension of the Church means that it is not only the coming to deeper life or the entry into conscious experience of the graces of baptism. So this understanding leads us to ask what in the experienced reality of baptism in the Spirit is a distinctive grace for our age, for this moment in the history of the Church, and what is the restoration of normality, the realization of what ought always to have been happening during the celebration of baptism? Both aspects are surely present in the experience of us all. It may not be easy or even possible to draw a sharp dividing line between God's charismatic gifting for our age and the invigoration of the basic baptismal grace. But the presence of both aspects requires us to say that baptism in the Spirit is a new outpouring in our day and that it also activates the graces of sacramental baptism.

### The Significance of the Charismatic Outpouring in Our Day

I have suggested that an important element in the charismatic dimension is God's supernatural provision for the Church in our day, for the Church at this point in history. This aspect reminds us that we Catholics had too static a view of the Church, as though the Church's task was simply to be faithful and to keep doing the same essential things century after century until an end generally seen as conveniently distant. *Semper eadem*, always the same, a motto attributed to a traditionalist Cardinal at the time of Vatican Two. One of the important contributions of Cardinal Newman was to help the Church to a more historical understanding. His version of *semper eadem* was the development of the acorn into an oak, looking very different but the same organism. So Newman could say, "To be perfect is to have changed often."

But in my mind there is a question as to the adequacy of Newman's model of development to include the "radical newness" that the charismatic dimension can bring. Newman was clearly right in pointing to the continuing identity of the one Church that keeps changing. The image of development sees all future developments as somehow contained within the original seed, and all actual development as an unfolding or emergence of the previously hidden potential. So the Catholic assumption has tended to be that "we have had

everything all along”, but now the Holy Spirit is bringing some neglected element to the fore.

However there are also challenges at the level of theology. Until now we have not had as Catholics a framework that had space that allows for a distinctively new charismatic grace to be conferred on the Church. But this has now become possible because of the decisive shift to a more historical view of humanity and the Church and is required for an understanding of the Church being prepared for its transition to the age to come. The revitalization of the sacrament of baptism also calls for an ongoing renewal in the theology of baptism. In fact, the language of “actualization of the graces objectively received in baptism and confirmation” has already been surpassed by the renewed sacramental theology of Vatican Two. The biblical and liturgical revival has restored the fuller meaning of “signs” to Catholic theology with the idea that the sacraments are efficacious signs in which the adequacy and “truth” of the sacramental signs again becomes important.