

## National Service Committees of the British Isles

### Talk 2: November 20, 2010

#### Renewal as Prophetic

Some years ago Fr Raniero Cantalamessa said that the charismatic renewal is prophetic or it is nothing. I profoundly agree with this statement and I want to explore its significance for us now at this point in the history of Catholic charismatic renewal.

To do this I should first say something about the prophetic. I understand prophecy and the prophetic to refer first to God's perspective on everything. The prophet sees or hears things from God. It is not simply about the future though that is an important element in the prophetic, because God's Word always redirects us to our final goal, not just personally but as Church and as creation. The prophet conveys how God sees the present as well as conveying glimpses of the future that God is preparing. The Renewal from its beginning had this prophetic element, first because at the heart of the experience of being baptized in the Spirit was a hearing of God's voice, the affirmation that the Lord speaks to His people, even today. This was not what we Catholics were accustomed to! But this impulse was strong at the beginning. My observation is that where the Renewal preaches this "open heaven" and the desire of the Father to speak to His people, there the Renewal is strong and growing. Where this is not happening, the Renewal is weak and in decline.

I want to speak about four different levels of the prophetic word. The first is the sense in which the whole Church is prophetic. The second is the sense in which the charismatic renewal is prophetic. The third is the prophetic role of leaders in the Renewal. The fourth is the calling of some individuals to be prophets. Let us look at these in turn, as I think this may help you to reflect on how the Renewal should realign, itself be renewed and then develop.

#### 1: The whole Church as prophetic

The great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian of the Church was probably Yves Congar, named Cardinal at the end of his long life (1904 – 95). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: "The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet and king." (para. 1546).<sup>1</sup>

#### 2: The charismatic renewal as prophetic

The whole outpouring of the Spirit in the charismatic movement should be seen as a reinforcing or a fuller restoration of the prophetic role and sensitivity of the Church. This is much more than simply the exercise of prophetic gifts within the Renewal.

#### 3: The prophetic role of leaders in the Renewal

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<sup>1</sup> See *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, para. 2: "the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ".

If we look in the New Testament at the places where prophetic words were clearly spoken, we find several examples: the warning of a coming famine by the prophet Agabus, the word to the prophets and elders in Antioch to set aside Barnabas and Paul for the mission (Acts 13: ), Paul's vision of the man in Macedonia that triggered the first mission in Europe. We should also see the messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Rev. 2 & 3 as prophetic words the Lord was speaking to these churches. Here we see a combination of rebuke and warning on the one hand and commendation and encouragement on the other hand. This is exactly what we find in the prophets of the Old Testament as well as in the life of Jesus. So when we look at the overall state of prophecy in the charismatic renewal today, we must expect both of these elements, the strongly challenging and the deeply encouraging. There were strong prophecies of this type at the Rome conference in 1975, prophecies over the broken body of "my Son", over the shepherds being called to repentance. These truly conveyed the heart of God to all who heard them.

My impression of words in the Renewal today that are presented as prophetic words from the Lord is that the majority are frankly pretty banal. Many seem to be along the lines of "My children, I love you". I am reading a book entitled *Jesus* by a leading German biblical scholar – slowly because it is in German – but it is excellent and really captures the originality and the challenge of Jesus. He makes a devastating critique of the reduction of the gospel to a banal "God loves you" message that says nothing about the condemnation of sin, about the deviousness of the human heart, about the coming judgment. This scholar says this message has become meaningless in effect and it has no impact. I am not saying that this is all we are saying in the Renewal, but I am saying that this danger is present among us. Which voices in the renewal are presently really challenging messages? Besides Fr Raniero himself, I can think of a few names: Daniel-Ange in France, Fr Ricardo Arganaraz of the Koinonia Giovanni Battista, Ralph Martin. No doubt there are others whom I have forgotten or of whom I am unaware, probably from Asia, Africa or Latin America.

I see the call to be prophetic as embracing several elements: one is the challenge to the world and society in which we live, one is the challenge to see all that the Holy Spirit is doing today, one is the challenge to lift up our eyes to see the coming Kingdom that the Lord is preparing through the Spirit. Let us look at each of these in turn.