

The Ecumenical Grace of Charismatic Renewal

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By Fr. Peter Hocken

For many years a major tension has existed in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) between, on the one hand, the need for the renewal to be authentically Catholic and to contribute in a significant way to the renewal of the Catholic Church, and, on the other hand, to do justice to the ecumenical character of the Renewal from its beginnings and to realize its major potential for Christian unity.

Both concerns have a fundamental legitimacy. From this angle, the tension is necessary. In this article I suggest ways to maintain this tension so that neither tendency takes over from the other: either the unity concern becomes so dominant that the need for the Renewal as an identifiable expression of charismatic renewal is called into question, or the concern to be Catholic leads to an ignoring or playing down of its ecumenical character and potential.

The origins

From its beginnings as a movement in 1967, the Renewal was blessed through the ministry of Protestant charismatics and Pentecostals. The famous Duquesne weekend in February 1967 resulted from Catholics reading *The Cross and the Switchblade* by then Pentecostal David Wilkerson. Some Catholics were baptized in the Spirit through the ministry of Episcopalians Richard Winkler in Wheaton, Illinois, and Dennis Bennett in Seattle. The first prayer meetings at Notre Dame were helped by a Pentecostal, Ray Bullard. Francis MacNutt experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit through Episcopal healing pioneer Agnes Sanford. In England, the Renewal had two sources: one, the movement arriving from the United States, the other from Catholics baptized in the Spirit through the ministry of Pentecostals. In France and Italy there were

also ecumenical contributions to the origins. In Colombia, Harald Bredesen lit the flame. In Peru, a visiting ecumenical team triggered the beginnings of charismatic renewal. In Korea, the Renewal began through the ministry of a Swedish Pentecostal called to Korea in 1970 to pray for Catholics to be baptized in the Spirit and through a Pentecost retreat she organized with Episcopalian Archer Torrey.

The origins of Renewal also manifested a strong orientation toward the renewal of the Catholic Church, which had no exact parallel among Protestants. The Second Vatican Council had placed a vision for the renewal of all Catholic life firmly in the Catholic consciousness. The emerging group of young leaders included graduates from Notre Dame, who had been active in Vatican II-oriented campus groups. This vision that the Renewal should serve the rejuvenation of the Church was examined in the book *Where Are We Headed?* (1973) by Steve Clark, an early Renewal leader.

These two elements were evident in all the large Renewal conferences of the early-to-mid-1970s, both at Notre Dame and the mid-Atlantic conferences at Atlantic City, New Jersey. The ecumenical component was visible in the invited participation of Protestant charismatic teachers, both for major talks and to lead workshops, and the hon-

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oring of guests from other Christian traditions. The orientation to renewal of the Church was clear in the teachings, in the role of the liturgy and in the presence and support of Catholic bishops. Both elements were evident in the life of new communities with an ecumenical make-up and an ecumenical vision. This holding together of the tensions reached its climax in the great Kansas City conference of 1977, in which the mornings were spent in church groupings, the afternoons had optional workshops from leaders in all traditions, and the evenings brought everyone together in the giant stadium.

A period of consolidation

From 1980, the period of mushrooming growth appeared to be over, at least in the United States, and a period of consolidation followed. It included more structuring of the Renewal (including diocesan liaisons, liaisons' conferences, a more representative National Service Committee) and the move of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office from Brussels to Rome, followed by the retirement of Cardinal Leon Suenens, who was an early leader in the Renewal and had encouraged the

move of the International Office to Brussels, and the first appointment of a bishop in the Vatican with responsibility for the Charismatic Renewal. People spoke about “moving to the heart of the Church.” In the Vatican, the Renewal came under the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which had responsibility for movements, which have since become known as the “new ecclesial movements.” This brought definite advantages for the recognition of the place of the Renewal in the Catholic Church, but it also tended to obscure its unique features—that it had no human founder like the other movements, as well as its ecumenical origins and character.

It is maybe not surprising that this period saw a decline in the ecumenical expressions of renewal. This prompts the question: was this decline a factor in a loss of dynamism in the Renewal and a decrease in its impact?

New ecumenical stirrings

While the ecumenical expressions in CCR were lessening, the Holy Spirit was raising up new witnesses to unity. Several pioneer figures (notably Michael Harper, then Anglican, Lutheran Larry Christenson, Pentecostal Vinson Synan and Redemptorist preacher Fr. Tom Forrest) came together in the mid-to-late-1980s to launch a new ecumenical network at the worldwide level, a pattern repeated in Europe and North America. Papal preacher, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, whose charismatic initiation had begun in Kansas City, was deeply convinced of the ecumenical character of renewal, and many will remember his electric talk on unity at the Brighton (UK) conference of 1991. At this time Charles Whitehead from England was emerging as a major figure in CCR; Charles has an Anglican wife and he was baptized in the Spirit through the ministry of an Anglican priest. So it is no surprise that he has constantly championed the ecumenical component of Renewal. (He is currently chair of the International Charismatic Consultation). Charles Whitehead provides an outstanding example of holding the ecumenical and the Catholic together.

Theological developments

Only at Vatican II in 1964 did the Catholic Church first endorse Catholic participation in the movement for Christian unity. In its teaching on the Church and those baptized outside the Catholic Church, the Council taught clearly for the first time that other Christians and their ecclesial communities are not simply “outside” the one Church. Since then, official Catholic documents have a language for describing their situation: other Christian bodies are in “imperfect communion” with the Catholic Church, that is to say, there is a real communion in the



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By Sean Connolly

things of Christ within the one Body of Christ, but there is not yet the full or perfect communion that characterizes the Church in communion with Rome. This change in our church understanding has not yet adequately influenced the ways that we Catholics think and talk about “the Church.” When we speak as though other Christians are totally “outside,” there is something lacking in our understanding.

Holding together the Catholic and the ecumenical belongs to the heart of our Catholic faith. So Pope John Paul II wrote on unity in 1995: “ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of ‘appendix’ which is added to the Church’s traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does” (*Ut Unum Sint*, #20). Following the Council it is no longer acceptable for Catholics to define what it means to be authentically Catholic in anti-Protestant terms—that the more you emphasize what Protestants deny, the more Catholic you must be! To be Catholic is to embrace the fullness of the biblical revelation, the fullness of Jesus Christ, the universal service of the Pope and to stand against all individualistic tendencies that weaken the ecclesial and corporate character of Christian faith. So, in *Ut Unum Sint*, John Paul II describes his ministry as Pope as a “ministry of unity” to bring the whole Body of Christ to its fullness of being “one” as Jesus and his Father are one.

Many are concerned today about the future of the Renewal. Fr. Cantalamessa has said that if the Renewal is not prophetic, it is nothing. One of the areas at the heart of the prophetic dimension of CCR is its ecumenical character. When we lose that, we lose the deep dynamism of the Spirit. But what can we do to ensure that the Renewal is both Catholic and ecumenical? First, and most fundamental, we have to help Catholics to acquire a new post-Vatican II sense of Catholic identity, that is defined in terms of Catholic fullness and no longer by what we are against! Second, we can ask what are the gifts that the others will bring to the Catholic fullness that unity will require. This corresponds to the teaching in *Ut Unum Sint* that “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts’” (#28). Third, we can bring the grace and empowerment of the Spirit in the Renewal to the wider Catholic work for Christian unity. Lastly, we need to pray. Ecumenism can never be reduced to a ‘program’! It is always a calling that can only be received in prayer. ■

At a February conference in Rome, Catholic Cardinal Walter Kasper made a bold proposal to Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed leaders: “an ecumenical catechism,” a joint commentary on the Apostles Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer.

That was unthinkable 100 years ago, when a group of Protestants met in Edinburgh, Scotland, for a conference credited with launching the ecumenical movement. The president of the conference read a telegram to the delegates from Anglican leaders containing a single, prescient Scripture verse: John 17:21.

Nowadays, every place the word “ecumenism” goes, John 17:21 follows: scrappy local prayer services, papal encyclicals, harangues over the scandal of a divided Christianity. It’s ecumenism’s ubiquitous theme—Jesus’ prayer to his Father—usually shortened slightly: “that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

A simple logic governs today’s ecumenical movement: unity comes first. Before “the world may believe,” before Christians can achieve the final clause of John 17:21, we must fulfill the first clause, unity. This translates into lots of high-level dialogues aimed at resolving doctrinal disagreements, but not into much common evangelistic effort.

But there’s another way to read John 17:21—in reverse.

It’s startling to look back from today’s dialogue-heavy ecumenism to discover that the 1910 conference didn’t involve a lick of dialogue.

That meeting—the World Missionary Conference—aimed in a different direction. Organizers like Methodist layman John R. Mott saw great promise for spreading the gospel through the expanding network of railroads. They adopted a motto, “the evangelization of the world in this generation,” and let nothing stand in their way. They invited Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Quakers and others to get together and talk, banning dialogue about doctrine, so they wouldn’t be diverted from conversation about missionary cooperation.

Simple logic. In the words of one Baptist newspaper,

