

Interview w/ Peter Hocken

I: You've been a part of Catholic Charismatic Renewal for many years. How did this change your life and ministry?

PH: Yes, I've been a part of Catholic Charismatic Renewal since 1971. I came into touch with the Renewal when I first read about the beginnings in the US and a book by Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan. I was in Rome studying, when I heard about the renewal. When I got back to England in the autumn of 1971, I saw a weekend advertised that was on the gift of prophecy and so I went. That was in October 1971. That was the first time I met people who were involved in the Renewal. I went to my first prayer meeting the following week and started to experience the work of the Spirit almost immediately

The first effect I noticed was a joy and delight in the Lord. But also the experience of the Lordship of Jesus – what was especially strong for me in the beginning was that Jesus is the living Lord today. He isn't just Lord theoretically, but He is Lord today - which means He rules today, He acts today, He is at work today and He's at work through His servants and directly in people's hearts. So first the aspect of the Lordship of Jesus came alive to me.

I also found the Lord opening up the Scriptures to me in a new way - that also happened immediately. I received the gift of tongues very quickly. Nobody prayed over me for this. I was praying with a few other people, they began to sing in the Spirit and I just knew I could join in. And I did. When it happened, it was like a huge release, it wasn't dramatic at all. I knew immediately that it brought very obvious benefits and fruits.

My ministry began to change - my whole way of preparing sermons changed radically. Before, my sermons were prepared more at the desk in an intellectual way - like you prepare a theological paper. And after I came into the experience of the Lord in the Renewal, I found that I was preparing sermons on my knees or in prayer. I began preparation by praying, getting a sense of what the Lord wanted me to say to the group I'd be speaking to. It made a huge difference to my preaching and, immediately, I began to see a difference in the impact the preaching made. Before that, the best responses to my preaching were: "Oh, that was a very interesting sermon, Father." But after this change, I found that people didn't just come up and say that something was interesting or to say "I liked your message", but I would find that something had really touched people and impacted their lives. So these were some of the main results of my coming into the Renewal, my being baptized in the Spirit.

I: As we are speaking about the Renewal, which aspects were touched by the Holy Spirit in the renewal of Catholic Church and maybe also in other churches?

PH: There are several dimensions to this question. First, I should say something about the Catholic Renewal at the beginning. The Catholic Renewal dates as a movement among Catholics from 1967 in the USA. And right from the start of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, there was a strong sense that it was meant for the whole church. It was a gift for

the renewal of the Church. It was also strongly influenced by 2nd Vatican Council because the beginnings of the CCHR occurred only 15 months after its completion. Pope John called this Council a Council for Renewal. He had composed a prayer for the Council which asked for the Holy Spirit to give a new Pentecost to the Church. So the first people in the Renewal in the Catholic Church understood what they were experiencing as a direct answer of the Lord to Pope John's prayer. They were experiencing something that was not just for them, but for the whole Church. That was a strong impulse. In the Protestant churches, there wasn't anything comparable to this.

Another aspect of the beginning of Catholic Renewal was that there was a very definite ecumenical dimension. In the origins in the US, the book of David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade* played an important role. And there was an ecumenical prayer group led by a Presbyterian in Pittsburgh which played a role of helping the first Catholics. And people from the Full Gospel Business Men were in close touch with Catholic Charismatics in the beginning. There was a dimension of help and influence from other Christians. It was not that the Movement was simply received from the Protestants or the Pentecostals, but there were definite connections and contacts that provided help. There was an ecumenical dimension in many countries, not just in the US. For example, it was very common in the early years for the big charismatic conferences to have a protestant speaker. This was normal in the US in the early seventies. The same thing was happening in other countries, also in places that were strongly Catholic countries - there was still a protestant dimension.

So there was an awareness of an ecumenical dimension in the Renewal. And there were new ways that reminded us from the Lord that it wasn't just something that concerned the Catholic church - it's the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh, all Christian flesh. So I think the Charismatic Movement has had a big influence throughout the world. We can see the same grace, the same fruit, the same characteristics in every country and in every denomination and church. There are differences of emphasis and style, but the fundamental characteristics are the same. And I think this is significant ecumenically - it's important for Christian unity. In Europe, we - Christians and church leaders often don't have an adequate understanding of how big an influence this movement has had throughout the world. In Europe, this movement has probably been weaker than on the other continents. In Asia, Africa, or Latin America, it is a much bigger phenomenon with a much bigger percentage of people involved and much bigger impact. This is often forgotten in Europe.

I: What do you see nowadays that the Holy Spirit is doing among the Christians towards the unity and what are the key elements?

PH: First, I think that the whole outpouring of the Spirit in the Charismatic Movement has opened doors that were not much opened before. It created new possibilities. So in many parts of the world, you find that relationships have grown up between Catholics and Evangelicals or Free Church people, including Pentecostals, in a way that, humanly speaking, is surprising. Now, it is not everywhere, but there are a lot of significant examples in many countries. And I think what we see here is a potential of the Holy Spirit

to break down all barriers. I found in my experience that Pentecostals are different from classical Evangelicals, classical Free Church Evangelicals - because a more traditional evangelical Christian is somebody who has a basic doctrinal grid. The traditional Evangelical is willing to have fellowship only with people who share a list of basic doctrinal convictions. And so this would totally exclude any relating to Catholics. They test everything by their doctrine: Do you believe this, this, this? And then: Ok, you're ok. If there's anything on the list you don't believe, you're not ok. Pentecostals don't tend to function like that. Pentecostals go much more by the evidence of the Spirit.

It's not true that doctrine doesn't matter for Pentecostals, but Pentecostals tend to look first whether the signs of the Spirit are in the people. If they see the same characteristics in people that they know come from the Holy Spirit, even though they're in unexpected places, like among Catholics, then many are open to considering this may be of the Lord. This has led to new possibilities in relating both with the Pentecostals and with Free Church Charismatics. Often, when these people meet Catholics who are filled with the Holy Spirit, they can recognize them as fellow Christians. But their first thought is that's not because they're Catholics, it's in spite of being Catholics. Or they may be thinking: "Yes, we recognize this is genuine, but how can they stay in their Church?" But often where friendships and relationships develop over time, they're led on beyond that, to begin to recognize the work of God in the Catholic Church and not just in individual charismatic Catholics. I've seen that happen with quite a lot of people.

Another thing that has happened in recent times is that many of the older Protestant Churches have become very liberal in their theology and have abandoned older moral convictions. Then many Catholics and Evangelicals who are defending traditional moral convictions about Christian life, about family, sex, life and death see that the other people who are strong and firm on these issues are from the "other side". The Catholics have begun to see that Evangelicals have strong convictions against abortion or euthanasia. And the Evangelicals see that the Catholic Church takes a strong stand. This can start a process of re-thinking their positions and attitudes. This is all the more so when they see that many traditional Protestant Churches have abandoned these positions. Often the first doors have been opened in the Charismatic movement because the work of the Spirit in Evangelicals baptized in the Spirit and Catholics baptized in the Spirit has obvious similarities. People recognize this and it opens up doors and new possibilities.

I: Can you also say something about Israel, what role did Israel play in the unity among Christians?

PH: When the Holy Spirit comes, people have a new level of conversion to Jesus, of submission to the Lordship of Jesus. They receive the Holy Spirit in a distinctive way. What the Lord does in Renewal is to bring people back to the very center of Christian faith in Jesus. The renewal of the church means that in all aspects of the church's life, we have to go back to having these central truths about Jesus Christ at the absolute center of the way the church lives and acts. This has a new life giving effect on all the activities in the church. But it's through this outpouring of the Spirit, this baptism in the Spirit that there is re-centering on Jesus in the lives of those impacted. This then has to translate into renewed life in which Jesus is once more restored to the place which He has officially,

but often not in reality. And this is the whole process of renewal. Part of this is also going back and restoring the Scriptures to their central place. This is the foundation. This process of renewal cannot happen without a whole new attention being given to the Scriptures in the life of the church. We find that in circles where people's faith has been enlivened by the Holy Spirit, they have a new love for the Scriptures, they want to study the Scriptures, etc.

This is where Renewal connects very easily with the Jewish question because the Scriptures are really the books of Israel. This is very obviously true of the Old Testament, but the New Testament was almost entirely written by Jewish believers who believed in Jesus. The only exception is Luke who may anyway have been a God-fearer. In fact, the question of the importance of the Jewish people, the people of Israel, for Christian renewal, for Christian unity, comes up in various ways. The ways that people have become aware of its importance can vary a lot from one person to another. In some people, it happens through their study of the Scriptures because the return to the Scriptures is the return to Jewish roots. For some people, it comes from a reflection on recent European history, by becoming aware of the terrible horror of the holocaust, the murder of 6 million Jews, men, women, and children by Hitler's Germany - an attempt to exterminate the whole people, which really has no parallel in history. So, the question arises for many in Europe: how could such terrible thing happen and become a reality in so-called Christian Europe? This has led to a deep examination of conscience of many European Christians, but, of course, especially in Germany. And in this self-examination, one of the things that come up is: what role did the church teaching and attitudes towards the Jews play? Today there is a quite widespread recognition among many people that whilst Nazism was not directly caused by Christianity, that the past attitudes to the Jews and the preaching that God had rejected the Jews because they denied Jesus created some of the atmosphere in which it was possible for people like Hitler to flourish.... and to put their plans into action. This is all part of a recognition which is now official in the Catholic Church that it is false to say that God has rejected the Jews. Practically all parts of the Christian world believed that for centuries - because the Jews had not believed in Jesus, therefore God had rejected them. Therefore, they were no longer God's chosen people, and the church had taken the place of Israel. This is called replacement teaching. More and more Christians and churches have now recognized this teaching is false. It was officially recognized by the Catholic Church at Vatican 2 in 1965.

So some of this re-thinking has come out of Christian reflection on the holocaust. But some of it has also come from new and deeper studies of what the New Testament actually teaches. There have been many studies on the teaching of Paul, for example, with a special attention to Romans 9-11. Here at the beginning of Chapter 11, Paul asked the question directly - Did God reject His people? And he says: No way, absolutely not. There's a whole teaching there. So a huge change has been affecting the whole Christian world. While the awareness of scholars and theologians is one thing; the awareness of the general public and church goes at a popular level is another thing. There are many Catholics who are hardly aware that Catholic Church has abandoned that idea that God has rejected the Jews. They still think that. One reason may be that there isn't much preaching about it.

The role of the Jewish people is very important for Christian unity. With this re-thinking of the place of the Jews, and more scholarly writing on the New Testament teaching about the Jewish people, there's much more examination of the early history. A key question is how did it happen that within three hundred years the Church went from being a totally Jewish church to becoming a totally gentile church that didn't allow Jewish converts to continue anything Jewish. How did this change happen?

With these studies, there's a new awareness that the first division in the Church concerned the Jewish believers. Sometimes it is said that the first division in the history of the Church was between the church and the synagogue. In fact, it's more accurate to say that in the beginning there were two stages in the division. The church starts by being totally within the people of Israel - as one group within it. Then Gentiles began to be admitted to the Church, and tensions start to arise between the Jewish believers in Jesus and the other Jews. A point comes when the Jewish leaders decide that Jews who believe in Jesus are no longer Jews, and they excluded them from the synagogue. This process began towards the end of the first century. This was a split within Israel - between Jews who believed in Jesus and those who did not. In fact, this was a fulfillment of the prophetic word of Simeon to Mary that her child is set for the fall and the rising of many in Israel, a sign that will be contradicted (Luke 2: 34). Mary's Son would bring division among his own people.

But the second split was within the church. It began when the church did not allow the continuation of the Jewish presence as such within the community of the church. This drove out the Jewish believers, groups that still believed in Jesus. This happened around the fourth and fifth centuries, though the roots go back earlier. Nobody knows exactly how long the Jewish church survived. Somebody has rightly said that history is written by the winners. So the records and writings of people who were rejected often just got destroyed, because they were thought of as being dangerous. So there's very little evidence as to exactly the groups of Jewish believers died out. But what is very clear is where it ended up: no explicit Jewish presence within the church. So there's more and more recognition that this was the original split in the church, and that therefore, the relationship between Israel and the Church is highly relevant for Christian unity.

When the gentiles began to come in, it was the apostle Paul who taught about the relations between Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ. In Ephesians he presented the model of the one new man, that the church is made up of Jews and gentiles reconciled in one body through the cross. As a result the gentiles become fellow members with the Jews; this is all in Ephesians 2 and at the beginning of Ephesians 3. And so this belongs to the nature of the church, this reconciliation brought by Christ, the destruction of the hostility between Israel and the nations that made possible this oneness in Christ, in His body, in His flesh. If this is the nature of unity, it follows that once you do not allow this union of Jew and gentile within the church, something is being destroyed that is central for the unity of the whole body. There have been a number of scholars, since the time of preparation of Vatican 2 in the Catholic Church, who've said that the first schism was this one. The relationship to the Jews is different from the relationship to other non-Christian

religions, because the other non-Christian religions are outside the Covenant. Whereas the Jews, the Catholic church is now recognizing and teaching, for example in the Catechism, the Covenant with Israel still remains. The church is brought into this, the New Covenant, and the result is the Jews and the Christians have an intra-Covenantal relationship. John Paul II said this very clearly.

So this question of Israel is absolutely crucial for Christian unity. Ultimately, Christian unity cannot be restored until a right relationship is restored between Jews and gentiles within the church. Today there are new possibilities, because about the same time as the beginning of the Catholic charismatic renewal, there developed the Messianic Jewish Movement of Jews who believe in Jesus and are determined to remain Jews. This creates new possibilities because for centuries, there weren't any groups of Jews who said: "We are Jewish believers in Jesus, who live as Jewish disciples of Jesus." Because the MJM is relatively new, it's not that developed, and the Church needs time to respond. Cardinal Schönborn of Vienna said at a synod on Rome in the late 1990ies that the question of Christian unity will only be resolved with the healing of the relation of the church and the Jewish people.

How can this happen? At the heart of it is going back to read the Scriptures, including the New Testament, through Jewish eyes. The Jews who believe in Jesus read the New Testament in a different way to Christians. Because they are Jews, they see things there that the Christians don't normally see. There is a process of going back to a more Jewish perspective and understanding of the Biblical text. This has the potential to unite Catholic and Protestant, because it goes back behind the historical controversies. Many of the controversies were only possible because of this distancing from the Jewish roots and a fundamentally Jewish understanding of the Scriptures.

I: You were speaking about unity, renewal of the church, Israel. How are these things connected together? Where is the Holy Spirit leading the church?

PH: I think they obviously are connected together. In a way, it shows the unity of Vatican 2. A lot of Catholics have thought the main things in the Council renewal are the theology of the church, the renewal of the liturgy and ecumenism. And then the Council also said something about the Jews. But in fact, all these teachings hang together. The Catholic catechism which was published in 1993-94 brings together this teaching, this new synthesis of Vatican 2 in an excellent way that brings out all these dimensions. All these dimensions involve a return to the Scriptures, making the Scriptures foundational in life of the Church, in renewal of the liturgy and the understanding of Christian unity and the place of Israel. All these things are different aspects of one work of renewal. But it may be easier for Catholics to see these connections because of the unity of the work of the Vatican Council.