

**In this issue :** *Mgr. dr. Peter Hocken from Vienna was invited to address the European Meeting of national representatives, Germany, November 2011. The general theme was: 'Living the grace of Charismatic Renewal'. Fr. Hocken was asked to speak about 'What we are experiencing now?'*

## **Living the grace of Charismatic Renewal What we are experiencing now?**

Fr Peter Hocken

**Charismatic and prophetic: these two words are interconnected, really inseparable**



I want to draw attention to what Mary Healy and I have said in the document we prepared for ICCRS on Baptism in the Holy Spirit / L'effusion de l'Esprit. Everything in the Renewal flows from this foundational event. I use the word "event" deliberately because the word "experience" can suggest something very subjective. So it is often good to use other words like event or reality to indicate its objective character.

In the document we emphasize the sovereign character of God's action in the Renewal in pouring out His Holy Spirit in this way. In an earlier draft of the document, we said: "Baptism in the Spirit is an experience of the love of God the Father, poured into one's heart, leading to transformed life in the lordship of Jesus in the power of the Holy

Spirit." This wording emphasizes the Trinitarian character of this work of God, but in the final version we added another important element. So the final version reads: "Baptism in the Spirit is a life transforming experience of the love of God the Father poured into one's heart by the Holy Spirit, received through a total surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ." The aspect of surrender to the living lordship of Jesus Christ today is at the heart of the charismatic and the prophetic.

### **The lordship of Jesus**

This yielding in the Holy Spirit to the lordship of Jesus makes possible the reception of the charismata called *charismata pneumatika* [spiritual gifts] listed in 1 Corinthians 12: 8 - 10. There are other charismata mentioned in the New Testament, such as celibacy and hospitality, but only those listed in 1 Corinthians 12 are called *charismata pneumatika*, spiritual gifts. I think this is because to receive these 1 Corinthian gifts we have to yield to the Lord, e.g. in order to speak in tongues, in order to prophesy. This is our experience with tongues; there is a surrender of our vocal organs, of our speech to the Lord, even when it seems stupid at first. A surrender of the heart is fundamental in this work of the Spirit. Through this surrender we begin to hear the Lord, another characteristic of the Renewal. The same pattern is evident when we receive prophetic words. This surrender is part of Life in the Spirit: we may hear words from the Lord; we may receive pictures; we can find as we read the Scriptures that something jumps out at us and the Lord speaks to us through the Word of God. These things have happened

before throughout the centuries, but the way in which this is happening in modern times represents something distinctively new. It is happening today on an immense scale and it is happening to ordinary Christians, not just to priests, nuns and serious ascetics.

### **The heart of the Renewal**

I want to raise some challenges to enable you to look at situation of the Renewal as you experience it in your countries so that you can do kind of examination of conscience. This could bring great fruit in each country.

The first challenge is to examine how much teaching is being given about this yielding, this surrender to the living Lord. The Renewal is not just about having a nice experience or feeling much better about ourselves. It is about hearing the Word of the Lord, and encountering the living God in a way that we know we have encountered the Lord, that we have heard his voice. Of course this needs discernment. The heart of the Renewal, the heart of the prophetic, is that we begin to see reality as the Lord sees it. This is at the heart of gift of prophecy: to see reality as the Lord sees it. Prophecy is not primarily about telling somebody about what will happen next week. The Lord can do that, I don't deny or devalue that, but the heart of prophetic is that we bring our world the Word of God for every situation, not just for suffering individuals but for our suffering society and suffering Church. Through the gift of the Spirit we see people and the world as the Lord sees them. It is out of this "vision" that the prophetic word comes. This is a question for us: is this how we are understanding the Renewal? Are we promoting this understanding of the charismatic, and the prophetic?

### **The depth of Prophecy and depth of music**

It is our experience that baptism in the Spirit at the beginning is often a transforming experience, sometimes overwhelming. But then it needs to mature. We need formation, we need to read all the Scriptures. Many people in the Renewal have had a positive experience, but they have never got really deeply into the Scriptures. So this is the second point of challenge: to examine the way how much we teach from the Scriptures. Have we been opening up the whole biblical revelation enlightened by the Holy Spirit to the people

within the framework of the Catholic heritage? The depth of prophecy is directly related to the depth of the knowledge of the Word of God. When people do not have a deep knowledge of the Word of God, you can get nice words that can bless people for a moment but they lack lasting impact because they have no depth. We can be always hearing prophetic words: "how I love you my people..." and so on. Yes, that can come from deep in the heart of the speaker and then it will impact the people. But often it comes out of a nice feeling of God's love, and is perhaps little more than a pious wish. But when we see things as God sees them, we begin to be outraged by evil, we realize that God's holiness is inseparable from realizing the horror of evil. If there is no horror of evil when we talk about holiness, it will not be going very deep.

With this question of deeper knowledge of the Scriptures, there is also the question of music. The Renewal has been extremely creative with music. Everywhere the Holy Spirit is poured out new songs are written. But the songs are often of uneven quality. Here too the depth of each song and what it expresses is related to the depth of knowledge of Scripture. Many of the new songs come from the new charismatic networks – a large number from the Vineyard and from Hillsong. As leaders, we need to be looking at the quality and depth of music being sung at our meetings. There is a real need for Catholic formation in the Scriptures at a popular level. I'm always being asked by young people: 'Father I want to really know the Bible!'. Often these people have contact with zealous young Evangelicals and Pentecostals so they also say: 'I want to know the Bible like they do! But I'm Catholic and I want to learn it as a Catholic. Where you can recommend for me to go?' Often I don't know anywhere to recommend, because we have very few Catholic counterparts to the courses found all over in the Evangelical and Pentecostal world: of one month, three months, six months, one year. In these courses, the teaching is nearly all from the Scriptures, but the framework is often individualistic and not ecclesial. It has its weaknesses but the strength of these courses is that they give the young people a basic knowledge and love of the Scriptures. Many young Catholics want this in a Catholic framework. This is an urgent need and a big challenge.

### **Fulfillment of God's goal**

The next challenge concerns God's goal, what God is aiming at. The goal is the Kingdom of God and the total lordship of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has been poured out to move the Church forward towards the fulfillment of God's goal. So when God pours out the Holy Spirit there is an awakened hope for the coming of the Lord in glory. This is an intrinsic dimension of the work of the Spirit. When we look in the New Testament there is more about the second coming of the Lord than anything else. Of course this requires wise teaching and wise leadership so as to avoid unbalanced teachings and people calculating when the world will end, which in any case Jesus warns against. But if we don't say anything about this "end-times dimension" there is something seriously missing. The Catechism has material on this in at least three of its four sections. The Catechism's teaching on the Our Father is wonderful. It says that the Our Father is essentially an eschatological prayer (Section IV, part 2).

### **Problems of secularism and the occult**

Two of the big problems that the whole Church faces today: one is secularism and other is the occult. There are other big issues like Islam, but in Europe secularism and the occult are major issues. Pope Benedict has been leading the way intellectually and spiritually in the battle against secularism. Bl. John Paul II was doing this but Pope Benedict is taking it further addressing the relationship between faith and reason. But we haven't as a Church been paying so much attention to the occult. When I go into book shops in England today and look for the section on theology and Christianity, they will show you a little shelf low down in the corner with one or two Bibles on it. But then you discover close by shelves of books on spiritualism, the occult and the esoteric. It is like this because this is what people are buying and what they are affected by.

I had an experience a few months ago: a girl of sixteen came to a weekend I was leading, a girl with very devout catholic parents who go to daily Mass. This girl had got deeply into the occult, really bad stuff. When we began to pray for her it was quickly evident that there were strongly demonic elements present. Soon she began screaming. It was as though she was

attached to the evil, but at the same time she wanted to be free of it. When the name of Jesus was mentioned, she had physical reactions with contorted face and body. There is a big challenge here. First that we are prepared and equipped to deal with this problem of the occult. Secondly, that we inform the church leadership of these increasingly frequent pastoral problems. In some ways, the situation has improved in the last 20 years, for now there are official exorcists in most Catholic dioceses in Europe whereas 20 or 30 years ago there were very few. It is an area that we will encounter more and more, and the Church including ourselves needs to be prepared for it.

### **Creative theology**

Two weeks ago I was in Riga, Latvia, for a Conference of the European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association, started mainly by scholars researching Pentecostalism but open also to students of Renewal. I have taken part regularly since its beginning in the 1980s. This time there was one other Catholic there, a young professor of Theology in Innsbruck, Austria. He gave a paper, one of the best papers at the Conference, really creative. His paper was on "Arguing in the Holy Spirit", how to handle a conflict totally in the Holy Spirit. He grounded his position on how Jesus Himself handled conflict, showing how Jesus identified Himself with sinners. He did not separate Himself totally from those with whom He was in conflict. It was profound. I don't see in Europe a lot of creative theology arising from a profound experience of the Spirit. We need to encourage young theologians who have been baptised in the Spirit, encouraging them to use their minds in service to the Lord.

### **Charismatic and institutional**

In the ICCRS document we take up this distinction between the Charismatic and the Institutional from John Paul II's Pentecost address in 1998. The Pope said: that the institutional and charismatic are co-constitutive elements in the nature of the Church, they are complementary, they need each other but they are not the same. In the document on Baptism in the Spirit/ L'effusion de l'Esprit we say that baptism in the Spirit belongs to the charismatic dimension of the Church. This needs more theological exploration, as it is very important for us to understand. At the heart of the

institutional element of the Church are the Scriptures, the liturgy and the sacraments, with the ordained ministry of bishops, priest, deacons and the ministry of Peter and his successors. This is the institutional structural element that is essential to the Church in the Catholic understanding. The institutional element is permanent, and present in every generation.

The charismatic dimension is different to the institutional. The charismatic dimension is the work of the Holy Spirit that is not present in the same way all the time but which comes and goes. The relationship between baptism in the Spirit as the foundational experience in the Renewal and the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation needs to be seen in the light of the relationship of the institutional and the charismatic. It is wrong to think that the Holy Spirit works only in charismatic and not in the institutional, or much less in the institutional. As Catholics we cannot accept that, so for us the real theological question is the difference between the way Holy Spirit works in the institutional part that's always there and the way the Holy Spirit works in the charismatic that comes and goes. In the charismatic element, the work of the Holy Spirit is always unpredictable and uncontrollable. An important contribution of the charismatic to the

whole life of the Church is that it reminds us that Jesus is always the Lord of the Church.

### **Things we had not expected**

With the charismatic dimension, there are always new things springing up in the Church, creative things that we had not expected. It is happening all the time and we need to be aware of this. It is very important for the National Service Committee (NSC) in every country to keep its eyes open for what the Spirit is doing, what things are appearing that have the marks of the Holy Spirit on them. In Europe the extent to which NSCs are in touch with what is going on in the work of Spirit in their country varies from one country to another. There are countries where there is a lot happening amongst young people, among young Catholics, and new communities are being formed without any contact with the NSC and the official structures of the Renewal. This is another challenge: how much are we as NSCs in touch with what the Holy Spirit is doing in our countries, also within the Catholic Church – and outside?

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Other reports on the European Meeting of national representatives of CCR, in Germany November 2011, are in Eucril 243, 244 and 246.

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