

INTERVIEW WITH PETER HOCKEN

With information about
his life-story, his vision on charismatic renewal
ecumenism and the second coming of the Lord

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Catholic Charismatic Renewal an eschatological sign

Goodnews interviews Fr Peter Hocken, an author and historian of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, about its origins and purpose, and why he believes it is an ecumenical grace and an eschatological sign sent to restore unity to the body of Christ in preparation for the Second Coming.

GOODNEWS: Have you always had a heart for Christian Unity?

FR PETER HOCKEN: I'm a convert and was brought up an Anglican, but I had no conversion experience and my faith as such wasn't strong enough to maintain church going after I left school. Then when I was doing my national service I was very impacted by a remarkable Catholic who was on the same base as I was. His example and what I read about the saints and heroes of faith in the books he lent me made me want to become a Catholic.

I was received into the Church in 1954 and soon after that in 1955 the Lord gave me a heart for unity. I felt a growing desire to become a priest and went to Oscott seminary to study (1958-64). My spiritual director here, affirmed me in my ecumenical sympathies but advised me to keep them hidden as these views would not have been acceptable at the time.

All this changed with Vatican II. In fact my time as a student was very much marked by the Council, and the preparations for the Council and its documents, particularly the Church's understanding of Christian Unity. As soon as I began working as a priest, I was

involved in gatherings with clergy from other denominations.

G: When did you first become aware of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal?

PH: I was involved ecumenically from about 1967 onwards and while doing further studies in Rome in 1969-71 I first came across Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan's book "Catholic Pentecostals". I was receptive to what they said but had no practical experience of this until the autumn of 1971 when I was back at Oscott, teaching moral theology. Here I saw advertised a weekend at Spode House led by the Dominican, Simon Tugwell, about prophecy. I went along and had my first experience of speaking in tongues.

A few days later I was praying in Birmingham with some people from this weekend. The other 3 were singing in tongues. Suddenly I knew I could join in and I did. Nobody laid hands on me but I saw the difference immediately in joy and my desire to praise God.

G. What effect did Baptism in the Holy Spirit have on your priesthood?

PH: The first thing that began to change was the way I prepared my homilies. This changed from desk preparation to chapel preparation before the Lord. I immediately saw the difference in the feedback I got. Before people tended to say “what an interesting sermon” whereas afterwards they didn’t comment as much, but I would learn later on that what I had said had often had a deep impact on their lives or way of thinking.

G: When did you first become aware that the Charismatic Renewal was an ecumenical grace?

PH: At the Spode House weekend I met some people from a prayer group in Edgbaston, which I started going to regularly. The people there had been baptised in the Holy Spirit through their contact with Pentecostals near Oxford and in Birmingham. And within a week of attending the prayer group, I was taken to Hockley Pentecostal Church in Birmingham. This was an amazing place where there was the most extraordinary racial and social mix among the people. I was very impressed with what I saw there and the earthiness of it and I realised from the start that the CCR movement had a strong affinity with the Pentecostals. The leaders at Hockley, who were two women, were very open to Catholics and a few of us would go there regularly.

G: How was this coming together of Roman Catholics and Pentecostals seen at the time?

PH: A lot of people on both sides were urging caution. On the Catholic side there were concerns about sheep stealing and of people going astray because of wrong theology and on the Pentecostal side there were suspicions that Catholic Charismatics were not really converted as many of them drank alcohol and smoked! I always knew, however that the link between the Pentecostals and the Charismatic Renewal was a work of the Lord. This became even

clearer later when I studied the history of the Charismatic Renewal movement and it was obvious to me that the Renewal could not have happened without the Pentecostal movement happening first.

G: How did the Pentecostal movement start?

PH: It began as a move of the Spirit in the Protestant churches at the start of the 20th century and it only became a cluster of separate denomination when it was rejected by them. However I believe that it needed these 50 or 60 years of separate development before it could come back into the mainline denominations.

G: How did you become involved in researching the CCR and the Pentecostals?

PH: Back in 1971 I was one of the few priests involved in the CCR, so I found myself not just giving spiritual talks but also reflecting theologically on it. I was asked to write a report on it for Archbishop Dwyer of Birmingham who was the chairman of the theological commission of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales.

In the beginning I was reflecting more on the theological issues such as Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts and only later did I become more interested in the history. The CCR was strongly marked from the start, however, with the sense that it was a grace for the whole Church. The view of people like Steve Clark, from Ann Arbor was that it the CCR, like the liturgical movement, needed to be a separate movement until the whole Church had received the grace. At the time I agreed with this view, though I realised that for the Renewal this had to be understood in an ecumenical context. Today I would stress more the prophetic calling of the Renewal within the Church, in which the prophetic and the institutional will always be in a necessary tension until the Lord comes.

For me it was obvious that it was a trans-denominational movement. At the time there were some people in the Church who were nervous of describing it in these terms. But for me trans-denominational was just a descriptive term – meaning found across the denominations – rather than a statement of authority or ecclesial identity. For me it was a spiritual fact that it had the same expression and gifts across all the churches. I underlined this in one of my earlier books, “One Lord, One Body, One Spirit”, stressing its ecumenical character rather than seeing it simply as a Catholic movement to renew the Catholic Church. But at the same time I distinguished the ecumenical from the non-denominational position, that regarded the historic Churches as unrenovable and argued for the remaking of the Church and its unity virtually from scratch. In this I was very influenced in my theological understanding by the great ecumenical visionary Abbe Paul Couturier, who preached that Church renewal and ecumenism were inseparable.

G: In what way?

PH: Baptism in the Spirit is opening up to the Spirit poured out by the risen, crucified Lord. Through this there is a greater openness to the Lordship of Christ and a greater conformity to Christ. This is in fact in line with the ecumenical teaching of Vatican II and the way to unity for everyone, not just as individuals, but as communities and churches. The more holy we become, the more deeply conformed to Christ and the closer we come to Him, the more Christian unity is advanced. Charismatic Renewal properly understood is about purification and deepening, centred on the relationship with Jesus in the Spirit.

G: How did the emphasis of your work change from taking a theological perspective to a more historical one?

PH: In 1976 I went to America for a few months and ended up staying for 20 years

with a community called the Mother of God outside Washington DC. While I was there I did a PhD . I had intended to focus on Baptism in the Spirit, but I found I didn’t agree with some of the views that were current, and I wondered what to do as I didn’t want to get bogged down in polemics. At this point I felt the Lord say to me, “I do not want you to study what other people think I am doing, I want you to study what I am doing.” This word became very important to me and I can see that it has directed all my work and ministry ever since.

As a result I began to study the origins of the Pentecostal movement and the charismatic movement. I realised you can’t see what the Lord is trying to do without knowing its history. This is why its history has become an important element in my writings. Key to the development of my thought was coming into contact with the Union de Priere in France and the writings of Louis Dalliere, a Protestant Reformed pastor who was very influenced by the Pentecostal movement in the 1930’s, but who chose to stay within his own denomination.

G: What were the insights of Louis Dalliere and how has this affected you?

PH: The main thrust of his teaching and insights were that the Baptism in the Spirit was sent for four purposes: 1) revival and conversion 2) for the organic unity of the Christian Church 3) for the illumination of Israel 4) To prepare for the Second Coming and the Resurrection of the Dead. This teaching strongly resonated with me and I began to study the Scriptures more in relation to this.

When I studied it, I saw that the gift of the Spirit in the New Testament is the gift of the first fruits, which is essential to prepare us for the coming of the kingdom and the resurrection of the dead. The Gift of the Spirit at any time in history is to prepare for the coming of the Lord and for total

salvation. There has always been a physical bodily element in the Pentecostal tradition and the Charismatic Renewal in regard to worship and ministry, which I believe links in to this idea of total salvation which we will experience when our whole beings will be delivered from death and Satan. Overcoming death in the resurrection of the body will be the completion of our salvation.

The other insight I picked up was in the importance of the Jews. Before Vatican II the commonly held understanding had been that because the Jews had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, God had rejected them, and the Church had replaced them in God's plan of salvation. Vatican II, however, affirmed that God's covenant with the Jewish people was not broken and they were still his chosen people and that their identity was still significant for salvation and the fulfilment of God's promises for human kind. This raised huge theological issues which still haven't been fully worked out.

In the Catholic Catechism for example, in the section on the Second Coming in paragraph 674, it says that the Second Coming is held in abeyance until the Jews come in. This means that the Second Coming can't happen until the Jews recognise Jesus as the Messiah. This began to affect my whole thinking biblically and theologically even though at the time I had not met any Messianic Jews, who are a comparatively recent phenomenon and didn't exist 50 years ago. After I wrote my book "The Glory and the Shame" where I expressed some of my thinking, I was introduced to some of the leaders of the Messianic Jewish movement and as a consequence I was invited to be one of the seven Gentiles, together with seven

Messianic Jews on the "Towards Jerusalem Council II" group. This is an initiative for the bringing of full reconciliation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus.

In Ephesians chapter 2& 3, the original unity of the Church is made up of Jew and Gentile in one body through the cross. That is why the unity of the Church cannot be completed without the restoration of the Jewish element. This was underlined in the 1998 Synod of Bishops by Cardinal Schönborn, who said the question of Christian unity cannot be solved apart from our relationship with the Jews. Without them something is lacking in the body of Christ.

G: What does all this mean? Is Jesus coming soon?

PH: In Revelations Jesus says, "I am coming soon". But we don't really know when that will be. It is a matter of discernment. But if you look at the signs of the time, the evidence would seem to point to the fact we are nearing the end, particularly because of the signs to do with the Jews. These include the return of the Jews to the land of Israel and the reappearance of a Jewish church. One can also look at more scientific data, such as global warming and the potential for nuclear catastrophes. According to the bible there is an appointed time for the gospel to be taken to the nations. Then it is going to come to the Jews. What does the fullness of the nations and the times of the nations mean? We don't know. There are also prophecies from both the Old and New Testaments which still remain to be fulfilled, many concerning the Jews. The Pentecostals believe that the baptism of the Spirit was sent for missionary

empowerment to take the gospel to all the nations of the earth before the soon-coming of the Lord. Looking around the globe, one cannot fail to be impressed by the huge growth of the Pentecostal and charismatic streams over the last 100 years because of this zeal.

parts of divine revelation without seeing and presenting the whole picture. Unity is a necessary element in the full picture because there is only one coming king, one coming kingdom and “*one hope that belongs to your call*”(Eph 4:4). Is it possible for the king to come for a Bride who is not visibly one in love, faith and hope?

Our task is first to understand the promises of the Lord for the fullness of his plan, what Paul calls “the mystery of Christ”. Often we just operate from

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