

Catholic Charismatic Renewal: An Ecumenical Current of Grace

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For my paper I will make use as major concepts of the following terms: Current of Grace, Classical Ecumenism, Charismatic Ecumenism, and the Creativity of the Holy Spirit. The first and the last come from Pope Francis, who has challenged the Renewal with his reminder, “Do not forget your background, the Charismatic Renewal was born ecumenical!”¹

I want to begin with the creativity and the newness of the Holy Spirit, a constant theme of Pope Francis. The creativity and newness of the Holy Spirit produce for us the surprises of the Spirit. It belongs to the nature of the Holy Spirit as God to be infinitely creative, always to bring newness. There is something new about every work of the Holy Spirit, even in every baptism, every eucharist, and every exercise of the charism of prophecy. It is never simply repetition. So the Holy Father says: “Our God is a God who always does new things. And he asks from us docility to this newness.”² This creativity results in an incredible diversity, both in the creation and in the redemption. Pope Francis has told us: “The cause of diversity is also the cause of unity: the Holy Spirit.”³

The Renewal itself is a prominent example of the creativity of the Spirit manifested in baptism in the Spirit and the spiritual gifts, but also in its ecumenical character intrinsic to this work.

As a current of grace coming from the Lord without human founders, the Renewal exhibits a stronger element of creativity and newness

than any work or movement arising from human initiatives. We see this newness in charismatic worship, in patterns of practical pastoral teaching, in ways of ministry - maybe especially in deliverance ministry - in new patterns of community living. We Catholics often do not appreciate the genuine newness because we are anxious to find precedents in past tradition. None of these things were happening before in this form. As an ecumenical current of grace, all these new patterns can be developed and exercised with other Christians baptized in the Spirit.

For the purposes of this paper I want to call **charismatic ecumenism** all these new forms of inter-church inter-denominational sharing that have arisen from the Renewal. Maybe the most expressive symbol of this charismatic newness is corporate singing in the Spirit when hundreds of voices join in spontaneous melodies to form one rich tapestry of harmonious sound. It may be the most striking example of the diversity of the Spirit that forms rich harmony from the diversity. It is a vivid picture of how the Holy Spirit works.

These examples of charismatic ecumenism go beyond the forms of **classical ecumenism** that had arisen following the entry of the Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement in 1964 with the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council: the launching of bilateral dialogues; Catholic involvement in Councils of Churches at continental, national, and lower levels; the Faith and Order work of the World Council of Churches; collaboration in the translation and distribution of the Bible. Catholic participation in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity then became quite normal. From an early stage the popes welcomed and affirmed the Catholic Charismatic Renewal,

¹ *Then Peter Stood Up* (addendum), p. 50.

² Daily Meditation, January 20, 2014.

³ Pope Francis, Address to CFCCCF, Oct. 31, 2014, *Then Peter Stood Up* addendum (ICCRS, Rome, 2016), p. 16.

more consistently and strongly in fact than many of the bishops. But it was as a Catholic movement that the Renewal was encouraged. Rome did not encourage the ecumenical dimension, as those familiar with the early history of the Catholic Fraternity will recall. One major reason for this reticence was the perception that the charismatic movement as a whole had little sense of the ecclesial, promoting a “Jesus and me” spirituality, a point to which we must return.⁴ Also the strong desire of Catholic leaders in the Renewal for recognition by the hierarchy led to the ecumenical dimension being downplayed. While charismatic ecumenism continued to develop in a number of places, for a long time there was minimal interaction at any level between charismatic ecumenism and classical ecumenism, both official and theological. The clearest sign of this gap was the Vatican’s Ecumenical Directory of 1993 that failed to make any reference to the Renewal in its long list of ecumenical activities in which the Catholic Church was involved.

With the Holy Father now insisting that this current of grace is inherently ecumenical, we are living in a *kairos* moment of great opportunity. By his personal embrace of charismatic ecumenism, the Pope is bringing to an end this lack of connection between official ecumenism and charismatic ecumenism. The call of Pope Francis to spread the baptism in the Spirit to the whole Church is a call for the coming together of conciliar renewal and charismatic renewal.

Exchange of Gifts: Reaping what the Holy Spirit has Sown

I want to focus on one point that is central for all ecumenism and then move to charismatic

⁴ This concern about Church figured in the debates about the difference between the “ecumenical” and the “non-denominational” that peaked around 1978 – 82. See the criticism of “churchless Christianity” in Kilian McDonnell, osb *The Charismatic Renewal and Ecumenism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) pp. 20 – 36.

ecumenism: what divided Christians can learn from each other. While the Vatican Two Decree on Ecumenism evaluated other Christian traditions positively for the first time, it was too soon to recognize that the Catholic Church could learn anything from Protestants. However, the Decree on Ecumenism had recognized in careful language that the Catholic Church can learn from the separated Churches of the East.⁵ But after 30 years of ecumenical dialogue, there was a breakthrough with St John Paul II’s encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995): “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts’.”⁶ Here there is a clear statement that the Catholic Church can receive “gifts” from other churches and communions, not only from the Orthodox. As a fruit of this teaching, official and theological ecumenism has developed the concept of “Receptive Ecumenism,” focused on what we can learn from each other. However, the focus of Receptive Ecumenism has been on what we can learn theologically.⁷ This theological reception has found its clearest example in the Catholic – Lutheran Joint Statement (Gemeinsame Erklärung) on Justification by Faith in 1999.

In 2014, Pope Francis goes further, introducing the role of the Holy Spirit. In his programmatic

⁵ “It is hardly surprising, then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed them better.” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 17).

⁶ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, para. 28. The phrase “exchange of gifts” comes from *Lumen Gentium*, para. 13, where the context is that of the richness of communion in the Church. John Paul II was extending the logic of LG 13 to ecumenical relations.

⁷ Cardinal Kasper sent a message to a conference on Receptive Ecumenism in England in 2009 in which he wrote: “Receptive ecumenism proposes a new orientation in our ecumenical dialogue, where talking is enhanced by listening, and confidence deepened by humility, recognizing that each tradition will be strengthened through insights from other Christian traditions.” (PCPCU, *Information Bulletin* 131 (2009 I – II), p. 28).

document *Evangelii Gaudium*, he wrote: “If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Holy Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us.”⁸

As is characteristic of Francis, the focus here is pastoral and practical. It is not simply what we can reap theologically, but also pastorally and practically in mission and ministry. Though the example the pope then gives: learning from “our Orthodox brothers and sisters ... about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality.”⁹ is grounded in theology, his words “If we believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit” point to the free working of the Holy Spirit that we experience in this charismatic current of grace. It would not be fanciful to see this sentence as a fruit of Cardinal Bergoglio’s experience of praying each month with five Pentecostal pastors from Buenos Aires.¹⁰ Here we can sense that the phrase “reaping what the Holy Spirit has sown” can apply both to classical ecumenism, referring primarily to theological reaping, and to charismatic ecumenism, where there is an element of receiving spiritually from the Pentecostals.

The Characteristics of Charismatic Ecumenism

How does charismatic ecumenism differ from classical and official ecumenism? As a broad generalization, I suggest that classical ecumenism starts from the present-day reality of the Churches in their outward and visible expressions (doctrine and theology; church government; liturgical practices), and then seeks to move towards convergence and reconciliation. By contrast, charismatic ecumenism starts from the Renewal’s character as one current of grace coming from the throne

⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 246.

⁹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 246.

¹⁰ See Austen Ivereigh *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2014), 253, 293-94.

of God, without human founders. Classical ecumenism begins with affirmations of commonality and awareness of remaining differences. Charismatic ecumenism begins on the basis of a totally shared common relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The most striking hallmark of this charismatic ecumenism is a radical equality between all believers baptized in the Spirit. Before the Lord, we are all equal. It is this common reception of baptism in the Spirit that makes possible all the forms of charismatic ecumenism. Here too the Holy Spirit had been preparing the way at the Council with its teaching on the vocation and mission of all the baptized, grounded in the sacrament of baptism. There can be no higher dignity than to be a Christian, beloved of the Father, redeemed by Jesus Christ and baptized into his body that is the Church, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis is taking us back to the Gospels, insisting that all ordained ministry has a servant character, and recalling the rebuke of Jesus to the discussion among the Twelve concerning “who is the greatest?” His reply remains relevant: among the Gentiles, the nations, “the kings lord it over them ... but not so with you.” (Luke 22: 25 - 26). This message is not an abandonment of Catholic teaching on the sacrament of orders, but a rejection of any understanding of the relationship between all baptized Catholics and ordained ministers based on worldly models of authority and precedence.

Christians baptized in the Holy Spirit experience the lifting up of the person and mission of Jesus as the core or heart of Christian faith. This lifting up, illumination, or revelation has as its centre the death and resurrection of Jesus. It includes his incarnation with virgin birth, and extends to his coming in glory.¹¹ In this transformation

¹¹ See, for example, 1 Cor. 15: 3 - 4; Phil. 2: 6 - 11; 1 Tim. 3: 16; Heb. 1: 1 - 4. One could also add Acts

through baptism in the Spirit, Christians recognize the same indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit in each other, whether Catholic or Protestant. This changes the ecumenical encounter from “us and them” to fellow pilgrims on the same journey (an image much used by Pope Francis); this walking together removes our fears of each other, the fears concerning our differences, opening us up to receive the diversity the Holy Spirit has sown in the others.

Through baptism in the Spirit there is a revelation of the Father’s love and mercy, that God is our “Abba!” to whom we pray Our Father with confidence. As Pope Francis has said, “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.”¹² Those baptized in the Spirit know they are equal recipients of God’s mercy.

This radical equality uncovers another difference between classical ecumenism and charismatic ecumenism. In the classical model, the Catholic Church is closest to the Orthodox Churches, both Eastern and Oriental, with their upholding of apostolic succession, the first seven Councils and traditional liturgy of Word and sacraments. Then comes the Anglicans and the Lutherans (both liturgical traditions); then the Presbyterians or Reformed, coming down the scale of shared heritage to the Mennonites, the Baptists, and the Pentecostals. The new charismatic churches had not yet made it to this scale. But in charismatic ecumenism Catholics baptized in the Spirit are closest – indeed more than close – to other Christians baptized in the Holy Spirit with whom they praise, minister, and serve together. Pope Francis clearly recognizes this different scale in his frequent meetings with charismatic leaders.

2: 22 – 24, 33, 36; Acts 3: 10 – 21; Acts 13: 26 – 39; Rev. 1: 5 – 7.

¹² Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, para. 1.

Does this mean that charismatic ecumenism has to replace classical ecumenism? Definitely not. Why? Fundamentally because the spirit does not replace the mind. The Holy Spirit is not a labour-saving device, although following the Spirit saves us from wasting our energy. Dialogues need to continue, but with the Holy Spirit being given more space.

Where Do We Find the Greatest Creativity?

I suggest that this is an important point for discernment as to how we move forward in charismatic ecumenism. I see the greatest creativity in some of the new charismatic churches and networks. Some of the most striking initiatives of charismatic inspiration have come from these “non-denominational” circles. In all the examples I will give, the exercise of the spiritual gifts or charisms has played a significant part, particularly the gift of prophecy.

1. **March for Jesus** reflects the creativity and ethos of the new charismatic churches, as well as a boldness of the Spirit. Taking the praise of God out on the streets of major cities, producing new praise songs to be sung while marching, deliberately proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus in the business districts of major cities.
2. The founding of **Houses of Prayer**, with a vision for 24-7 prayer, initially modelled by the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, USA, is a fast-spreading example of charismatic ecumenism. The Houses of Prayer have channeled and intensified a remarkable increase in intercessory prayer since the 1980s. In Europe, Houses of Prayer have been spreading among Catholics, often inspired by the Augsburg House of Prayer in Germany.
3. Also pioneered by new charismatic churches, though as yet not much found among Catholics, have been

prayer journeys for confession of historic sins to places associated with major conflicts and bloodshed in the past. In this last example, the charisms of prophecy, and words of knowledge, as well as discernment of spirits, have been key.

I spoke of this creativity as being found in some of the new charismatic churches. It is not true of all. I see that the creativity is linked to openness to the full work of the Holy Spirit. This includes openness to Catholics and to Catholic participation. This openness has characterized the initiatives I have mentioned (March for Jesus, Houses of Prayer, Repentance Prayer Journeys). In France it can be seen in *Paris – Tout est Possible*, led by Carlos Payan, who has pioneered many initiatives with Catholics, including mutual foot-washing with Catholic bishops. It can be seen in the largest Messianic Jewish congregation in the world in Kiev, Ukraine, where the leader Boris Grisenko made a priority the building of relationships with Church leaders, including the Greek Catholic and the Roman Catholic archbishops. The Vineyard movement has manifested such an openness, so that in Germany there is a Catholic community affiliated to Vineyard with the pattern of cooperation approved by the local bishop. Another example is Global Awakening led by Randy Clark, who invited Mary Healy to accompany him for 3 weeks on a trip to Brazil.

There can also be this kind of openness and creativity among Pentecostal leaders, as has been evident in the close collaboration of Pastor Giovanni Traettino with Catholic lay leader Matteo Calisi, which contributed to the foundation of CRECES in Argentina and Brazil.¹³ The faith of Pentecostals in the Holy Spirit can predispose them to look first for signs of the Holy Spirit rather than for

¹³ Comunion Renovada de Evangélicos y Católicos en El Espíritu Santo.

doctrinal error. But some of their denominational requirements and attitudes can work in the opposite direction.

Practically Reaping from the Sowing of the Holy Spirit

I suggest that we in the Catholic Renewal can become much bolder in receiving from what the Holy Spirit has sown in the free charismatic and Pentecostal churches. First I mention some examples of what has already been done, a few coming from thirty years ago. In Poland, Fr Frantisek Blacknicki, now a candidate for beatification, invited Protestants from Campus Crusade and from Youth With A Mission to train young Catholics in the Oase (Light-Life) movement how to evangelize. In England, Charles Whitehead was invited by leaders in the Pioneer network to participate in their leaders' formation meetings – they saw that there was nothing then in the Catholic Renewal to develop Charles as a leader. Also in England, Nicky Gumbel, the director of the Alpha Course, invited Fr Raniero Cantalamessa to join the Alpha staff for their summer working break. Just two summers ago, Randy Clark invited Mary Healy to accompany him on a ministry trip to Brazil. These are all examples of exchanges within the charismatic current of grace. But a model for bold reception was provided by Cardinal Bergoglio when he invited his Pentecostal pastor-friends to preach a retreat to the priests of Buenos Aires.¹⁴ And in Austria Cardinal Schönborn took part in a meeting of all the deans of Vienna with the free church leaders.

Based on these examples, it is not hard to imagine where Catholics can be blessed by charismatic and Pentecostal leaders. The following areas suggest themselves with a focus on the role of the Holy Spirit and actual practice:

1. Formation of leaders.

¹⁴ These retreats happened in 2010 and 2012. See Ivereigh, *op. cit.*, 294.

2. Networking between leaders.
3. Preaching.
4. Having a vision for cities.
5. Dealing with the occult and spiritualism.

In all of these areas, Catholics though maybe stronger in theology are generally weaker in practice than their Pentecostal and charismatic counterparts. Initiatives of collaboration in these areas could be seen as part of “the pastoral and missionary conversion” of the Church.¹⁵

What the Others can Receive from Catholics

It is primarily for the other Christian groupings and traditions to discern what they are to receive from what the Holy Spirit has sown in the Catholic Church and tradition. It is not for us to tell them first. For through their interaction with us they will receive what the Holy Spirit wants them to receive, which is not always identical with what we want them to receive.

There are obvious areas where interaction between the Catholics and these other Christians needs to take place. But these conversations need to arise naturally out of the friendships formed by walking together over a longer period. The first is in the area of liturgy, and in particular the relationship between the liturgy and free forms of worship. This topic leads naturally into the place of tradition, for the liturgy is at the heart of the Catholic tradition.

A second area concerns Mary and the Saints. This sharing can only begin when a deep trust has been established.

Another area is that of biblical interpretation – between biblical criticism and fundamentalist-type literalism.

The area of Israel and the Jewish people can be a productive theme, as both sides (Catholic and

Evangelical-charismatic) face similar challenges in correcting past patterns of replacement misinterpretation of the Scriptures of both Testaments.

When these conversations develop, the pattern will be different to the established pattern of ecumenical dialogues. For it will be grounded in the shared experience of the Lord arising from baptism in the Spirit. Mutual trust will have banished the fears and suspicions. There will be a shared desire to learn from each other. Then surprises of the Holy Spirit can take place. Pope Francis has already tasted this deep encounter and from this comes his teaching on reconciling diversity.*

* On 3 June 2017, [Pope Francis emphasised the importance of reconciled diversity.](#)

On 4 June 2017, [Pope Francis his homily was on unity and diversity.](#)

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¹⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 25.

This talk was given by dr. Peter Hocken on *1 June, 2017*, in a theological symposium in Rome, organised as part of the worldwide celebration of 50 years Catholic Charismatic Renewal. This whole symposium is to be watched on www.vocepiu.it/GoldenJubilee or www.ccrgoldenjubilee2017.net.

The next day, *2 June 2017*, Peter Hocken presented in the same University Urbana a program on Romans 9 - 11 with two messianic Jewish rabbis, Dr Richard Harvey and Marty Waltman. They tell an amazing story about the developing dialogue of Messianic Jewish theologians with the Vatican. See <http://www.kcv-net.nl/meer/a/video/peter-hocken-final-contribution-before-he-died-2017>.

Father Peter Hocken died in the early morning of *10 June 2017*.

More on Peter Hocken at www.stucom.nl:

[0296uk](#) Interview with Peter Hocken with a list of more documents from him on www.stucom.nl.

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