



WORKSHOPS – D2.1	SPEAKER : FATHER RANIERO CANTALAMESSA - ofmcap
TITLE : CHARISMATIC RENEWAL: AN ECUMENICAL GRACE	
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I will have the opportunity to talk about the ecumenical dimension of the CR also on Saturday evening, during the Pentecost vigil in Circo Massimo. I would like to share something here about my personal experience and to share how the CR has become an ecumenical grace for me. This won't stop me from doing, from time to time, some theological reflections on the topic of this seminar.

I did my theological studies in Loreto from 1954 till 1959. The structure of the lessons was nearly always the same: thesis, adversaries, demonstration (the catholic thesis would always be triumphant). The adversaries were on some occasions the orthodox and in most cases the protestants. I think that things were not that different amongst the other denominations, with us Catholics in the role of the heretic adversaries.

The academic studies to get a PhD in Theology at Fribourg (University) between the end of the 50s and the beginning of the 70s didn't substantially change that attitude. It was the time of the Council, but the texts and the manuals we studied were the old ones. The 2nd Vatican Council certainly meant a break, inaugurating a new attitude in the Catholic Church in the search for unity. From being «adversaries», the other Christians started to be called «separated brothers » and then simply «brothers ».

The Council set up the doctrinal basis for the change, but for me at least this wasn't the decisive factor. On the contrary, it was getting to know the Charismatic Renewal and the baptism in the Spirit in 1977. This experience didn't change my attitude towards Christians of other Churches through theological reasoning, but spontaneously, without me realizing it. The grace of unity had come with the gift of the Spirit.

The opportunity for me to show my new attitude towards brothers and sisters from other churches was the international conference for Catholic Charismatic Renewal leaders celebrated in Rome in 1984. I was called to give a teaching about the Church as sacrament of unity. In this conference there was a person that was invited to participate who was a pioneer in ecumenical dialogue among Pentecostals : David du Plessis. It was him, after my intervention, who suggested to the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians in the Vatican (as it was called then) to invite me to be part of the Catholic delegation for the dialogue with the Pentecostal church, of which he was the promoter. And this is how I became part of the Catholic delegation, thanks to the interest of a Pentecostal brother !

This experience has been an authentic blessing in my life. As we sat together one week a year, for more than ten years, around the same table, sharing prayer and the Word, we managed to establish some human relationships, not at a distance or through books and documents, but in person. There I realized that the points of view of other Christians, coming from their own mouths, were very different to what I knew from books and it was very difficult always to be a winner in



the confrontation. The distance in the doctrinal and structural positions between the Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Churches didn't stop an authentic friendship and a deep spiritual fellowship, which are the real conditions for truly closer relationships between Christians.

Nevertheless my ecumenical openness hasn't been limited to the Pentecostal Church. Since the Lord asked me to leave university teaching to do proclamation full time, I have discovered the strength of Luther's thinking, and some of his works are amongst the books I always have within reach.

I am going to explain how I see the path towards Christian unity today, and what is, in my opinion, the contribution that charismatic movements can provide. The first duty, I think, is to be free of the remnants of past controversies. I am more and more convinced that some opposing positions weigh heavy over the ecumenical dialogue which have lost much of their reason to be but still remain as stereotypes and words of order.

Here is an example : the opposition between faith and works. This topic is hardly dealt with. It creates the need between Catholics and Protestants to reaffirm their own position as if this were still a subject under discussion. The Catholic Church and the World Federation of the Lutheran Church reached a fundamental agreement about the doctrine of justification by faith in 1999, but in many places people talk about it as if there were still a great gap between the two Churches.

If we pay attention, we realize we are closer to each other in reality than we are in the theory. In reality, today, the opposition between faith and works is a false problem that still stands mainly due to the historic controversy over it. « Good works » are not understood mainly anymore - as sadly happened in the time of Luther – as indulgences, pilgrimages and pious practices, but as the fulfillment of the commandments, especially that of love. Jesus says that in the final judgment some will be excluded from the kingdom of God because they haven't clothed the naked and given food to the hungry, and this is what the New Testament calls « good works ». One cannot be saved by good works, but one cannot be saved without good works. This is not something that only Catholics believe, all Christians believe and preach it.

The situation is identical with other traditional opposing positions like Scripture and Tradition. If we understand Tradition not as that group of heterogeneous things (many of which are evidently of human origin), but as « Scripture read in the Church and for the Church », again we realize that we are closer (although not completely unanimous) in reality than in formulae. Sometimes I have asked protestant brothers that because of friendship and reciprocal trust I was permitted to ask: « You believe in the Trinity and you profess the divinity of the Holy Spirit, isn't that right ? And nevertheless, neither one nor the other are affirmed in Scripture, but, rather, in the Councils, that is, in Tradition ».

Each Church has got its tradition, very often the more operative this is the less recognized it is. If the same Churches that emerged from the Reformation are different from each other, even though all of them profess the principle of Sola Scriptura, it is because each one of them has developed its own way to read and interpret Scripture. I have loved to hear a Pentecostal colleague, in the course of our dialogue, affirming: « The history of the Church is also our history, its heritage is also our heritage ». This means, in my opinion, to rediscover and re-appropriate the Tradition.



Perhaps ecumenical dialogue would become clearer if we concentrated our efforts in valuing the common background of our traditions, what is binding for all of us and what at the same time is gift and richness for each one in particular, and, above all, what are the ways and the instruments specify all of this. I think we all have some way to walk : The Reformed churches must recover elements from the genuine apostolic tradition that have been improperly put to one side; the Catholic and Orthodox Churches must purify their tradition of human and historic elements that have been improperly considered as an integral part of the genuine apostolic Tradition.

I come back to my experience. After my new opening to the Holy Spirit and my conversion to the cause of unity, I started receiving invitations from leaders of other Christian denominations. I preached a retreat to seventy Lutheran pastors in Sweden (think about it: a Catholic that speaks to Lutherans, and to top it all off, about the letter of St Paul to the Romans!)

In 2009 there was a large demonstration of faith in Stockholm called the “Jesus Manifestation.” On the last day, believers from various churches, each coming from a different street, processed toward the centre of the city. Also, the small group of Catholics, led by the local bishop, processed down our street, praying. Once at the centre, the separate procession lines broke up and merged into a single crowd that proclaimed the Lordship of Christ before a crowd of 18,000 young people and of astonished bystanders. What was intended to be a demonstration “for” Jesus became a powerful demonstration “of” Jesus. His presence was almost palpable in a country that is not accustomed to that kind of religious demonstration. I also had the joy of exercising my ministry among protestant brothers and sisters in other Scandinavian countries : Denmark, Norway and Finland.

With the Anglicans, the most remarkable experience happened in November 2015 when the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, invited me to preach the homily during Mass in Westminster for the inauguration of the General Council of the Anglican Church in the presence of Queen Elizabeth. When the Queen addressed the General Council immediately after, she said: « something has changed among Christians so that a Catholic priest is invited to preach the homily in Westminster ! »

Preaching to brothers and sisters from other Christian denominations – Pentecostals, Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists – already occupies about a quarter of my activity, and I consider it one of the greatest blessings of my life. Frequently – as happened a year ago in Birmingham, Alabama, and in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota – the event is supported jointly by the Catholic Bishop and by the person responsible for the local protestant community.

My contacts with brothers and sisters of different Churches born from the Reformation have always been inspired by the great principle of John Paul II: « Share in common those things that unite us, which are much more important than those things that still separate us ». I think that in St Augustine’s doctrine on the Church there is a point that can help the ecumenical cause. The distinction of the two levels of realization of the true Church – one external, of signs, *the communio sacramentorum*, and another one, internal, of grace, the *societas sanctorum* – allows St Augustine to draw up a principle that is very current : « Things can exist in the Catholic Church that might not be Catholic, just as things can exist outside the Catholic Church that might be Catholic »



The two aspects of the Church – the visible and institutional and the invisible and spiritual – cannot, according to Augustine, be separated. This is true and it has been confirmed by Pius XII in the encyclical *Mystici corporis* and by Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium*; but as long as the two do not coincide (due to historical difficulties and the sin of men) we cannot give more importance to institutional communion than to the spiritual one.

This raises a question, can I, as a Catholic, feel more in communion with the multitude of those that, although they have been baptized in the same Catholic Church, have no interest in Christ and the Church, or they are only interested in saying bad things about it, then I feel in communion with the group of those that that, although belonging to other Christian denominations, believe in the same fundamental truths that I believe in, love Jesus Christ to the point of giving their lives for him, spread the Gospel and have the same gifts of the Holy Spirit that we have? Naturally, these are questions that Christians of other Churches should also ask themselves in relation to Catholics, and, thank God, that's what's happening to a large extent.

The path to be followed today goes, in a way, in the opposite direction to the one followed by Augustin in his controversies with the Donatists. Then we needed to move from the communion of the sacraments towards communion in the grace of the Holy Spirit and in charity; today we must move from the spiritual communion of charity towards full communion also in the sacraments, of which the Eucharist is the first. Specifically, it would be necessary to start doing some things together, already involving other churches in the decision-making phase, as Pope Francis has done on the occasion of this Jubilee.

We are starting to hear from many sectors of the need for a spiritual ecumenism that helps and sustains the doctrinal and institutional, if we don't want to end in dry and endless human discussions. Spiritual ecumenism means praying together, evangelizing together and, most of all, loving and accepting each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The great temptation that must be avoided when we face the big problem of unity is to reduce it to a human problem that must be resolved with human techniques, as happens with problems of racial or political unity which many states must face. Neither is it a problem that must be resolved with discussions about moral and theological problems that concern the true Church. Theological discussions are useful and necessary, but if they are not sustained with a supernatural spirit they do not produce any change inside the different religious denominations.

Unity is a mystical fact before being a reality that is manifested socially and visibly in the world. It is rooted in the kingdom of the invisible, in the risen Christ who has the power to submit all things under Himself and to destroy the wall of separation that has been created between Christians, as in the beginning He destroyed the wall of separation that existed between Jews and gentiles. A mystical fact cannot be understood and lived but through the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, unity in the Church is the reflection of the perfect unity between the Father and the Son through the work of the Holy Spirit, as is clearly stated in chapter 17 of St. John's Gospel.

When this founding principle is forgotten and man and his thinking takes its place, we introduce the principle that generates enmity where love reigned before. The problem of ecumenism walks vigorously towards the solution when the different denominations and the Church remove, by the



inspiration of the Holy Spirit, all the material that has no spiritual value that they have accumulated in their midst and deviates from or delays the path of the faithful towards pure faith and pure love of Christ and the Father. In the same way as with the founding principle, the goal of ecumenism is also of the mystical order. It is not about trying to formulate in a uniform way a doctrine of faith, nor about having the same ecclesial and liturgical discipline. It is about all of us living the same communion of life with the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.