

Charism and Institution working together

Charism and Institution working together by Brendan Leahy

Names such as Charismatic Renewal, Communion and Liberation, Cursillo, Faith and Light, Focolare, L'Arche, St. Egidio and other names of large and small communities are now becoming part of the Church's vocabulary in Ireland. On March 21st last twenty of these movements got together in Clonliffe college to prepare for this year's Pentecost Sunday which will see many of these new lay movements in the context of the Dublin diocesan Jubilee preparations gathering in the O'Reilly hall in UCD. There they will celebrate the work and effects of the Holy Spirit through their various missions and charisms.

Pentecost '98

What lies behind this event takes us into a story being written by the Spirit in our times. Last year's Pentecost celebration in St. Peter's Square marked a particular moment in that story. Following a three-day conference in Rome for the movements' leaders, approximately 400,000 members of 56 of these new communities met for the first time *together* with the Pope. It was an occasion to give a common witness in the context of the Jubilee. The upshot of last year's events has led people to speak of a "before" and "after" Pentecost '98 – the new movements (to which approximately 80 million catholics adhere) have found their place in the Church. They are an expression of the Church's charismatic dimension working together with the Church's Institutional aspect.

A New Ecclesial Maturity

Vatican II

To understand what this means for them it is necessary to revisit briefly some of the key moments of the Church's journey this century. It was said as early as the 1920s that ours would be the century of the Church, the period when the living reality of the Church would awaken in people's hearts. The Second Vatican Council was the Council of the Church and one of its novelties was the rediscovery of her charismatic dimension. The Holy Spirit doesn't sanctify and guide the people of God through the sacraments and ministries alone but also through special graces among the faithful. In other words, as well as the institutional dimension, there is a charismatic profile of the Church. Both aspects are "co-essential", the Church wouldn't be Church without them.

After Vatican II

The Council brought the true face of Church with these two co-essential aspects into view. Its written words were prophetic signposts. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit new movements were born both prior to and soon after the Council. In time they would come to be seen as an almost totally unexpected and unplanned translation into life of the Council's renewal.

Initially, the energy and enthusiasm of these infant realities attracted many and perplexed others. In the words of John Paul II, the birth and spread of the movements has at times “led to presumptions and excesses on the one hand, and on the other, to numerous prejudices and reservations”. Given their infancy, the new movements sometimes presented themselves in a manner that was perceived as exclusive or one-sided. And given the ever present temptation for institutions of the Church’s structural continuity to become rigid, there was discomfort in working out where this unplanned phenomenon fits into pastoral programmes and organisation.

All of this can now be seen as “a testing period” that helped verify the authenticity of the movements’ charisms. By 1998, however, John Paul II pointed to a new ecclesial maturity among the movements. Convinced they are the Spirit’s providential response to the demands of our times and a sign of the diversity of forms taken by the one Church, he invited others to take note of this providential gift. The flowering of ecclesial movements “has still,” he remarked in 1996 “to be adequately understood in all its positive effectiveness for the Kingdom of God at work in history today.” They are a lively expression of the co-constitutive charismatic dimension of the Church.

The theological Context of Ecclesial Movements

It was to further this understanding that, together with the new movements, the Pontifical Council for the Laity organised a conference prior to the Pentecost Vigil. Its theme was: “The Ecclesial Movements: Communion and Mission on the Threshold of the Third Millennium”. Three hundred participants predominantly lay and young, men and women from various parts of the world took part. A key feature of the gathering was the newly discovered genuine interest in each other’s charism and mission with no trace of competition or rivalry. On the contrary, what came across was an ardent desire to be in communion with one another in building up the civilisation of love called for by Paul VI and in the commitment to the new evangelisation launched by John Paul II.

Cardinal Ratzinger’s Talk

Cardinal Ratzinger’s talk on “The Theological Context of Ecclesial Movements” was a high point. [1] Naturally, people were curious to hear what he would have to say, given his theological expertise and his position as prefect of the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith.

Insufficient Theological Approaches

After expressing his own very positive encounter with these new movements in the 1970s, and having raised the theological questions that arise from their emergence, he looks at possible theological approaches to help explain them. In thinking of the relationship between movements and the permanent structures of the Church, one approach might be a dialectical one of contrasting the charismatic and institutional aspects of the Church, christology and pneumatology, hierarchy and prophecy. But in his view there is something insufficient in this approach as it risks setting up too sharp a split between two constitutive dimensions of the Church. After all, Christ and the Spirit, ministry and holiness, cannot be split. Those who form the institutional/sacramental ministry in the Church are themselves not simply bureaucrats but

called by God!

Perspectives from History

In the second and most innovative part of his talk, Ratzinger offers a theological understanding of movements from an historical perspective. After Pentecost the twelve “apostles” were the initial bearers of Christ’s mission to the world. From the apostles’ universal missionary activity, local churches came to birth with gradually fixed and permanent forms of ministry (bishops, priests and deacons).

The First Two Centuries

Throughout the first two centuries, however, the apostolic *universal* ministry (no longer reserved to the twelve and including women) continued together alongside the *local* ministries of the community. When the ends of then accessible world had been reached at the second century there was a gradual disappearance of this “supra-local” ministry carried out by the itinerant “apostles”. The heads of the local churches became aware of themselves as the successors to the apostles with apostolic mandate was upon their shoulders.

We Need to extend the concept of Apostolic Succession

Nevertheless, Ratzinger reminds us not to limit apostolic succession merely to the local sacramental structure of the Church. He points to the need to give the concept of apostolic succession greater breadth and depth. “First of all, we must keep the sacramental structure of the Church as the permanent core of the apostolic succession. It is in this structure that the Church receives ever anew the heritage of the apostles, the heritage of Christ... But this core is impoverished, indeed, it atrophies, if we think in this connection only of the system based on the local church”. What Ratzinger discerns in the two thousand years of the Church’s history is that the universal and missionary dynamism of the itinerant apostles of the first two centuries continues in the Church also in the Petrine ministry and apostolic movements. That is to say, in the concept of apostolic succession there is something that transcends the merely local ecclesiastical ministry – the universal element remains indispensable.

Papacy and the Movements

To demonstrate his point, Ratzinger notes a twofold development with the demise of the supra-local itinerant “apostles”: the growing primacy of Peter and the emergence of the apostolic movements. On the one hand, the office of the succession of Peter breaks open the merely local ecclesial model. He embodies an essential side of the apostolic mission which can never be absent from the Church. But the universal and evangelising dynamism of the apostolic mission is also to be found in the apostolic movements.

Specific Examples from History

Anthony the Abbot

It is in the third century that we witness the emergence of the apostolic movements, starting with what Ratzinger calls the “movement” of monasticism. Anthony the Abbot wanted to live the radicality of the Gospel and removed himself from the established local ecclesial structure that had gradually adapted itself to the demands of worldly life. Anthony wanted “to follow Christ without ifs, ands, or buts” and “his new spiritual fatherhood...supplements the fatherhood of bishops and priests by the power of a wholly pneumatic life”. In other words, Anthony continues something of the first centuries’ supra-local missionaries in his radicality of the Gospel and the evangelising nature of spiritual paternity.

Saint Basil

The case of Basil reminds Ratzinger even more directly of the situation of the movements in our century. He sought “not a community apart, but Christianity as a whole, a Church that is obedient to the Gospel and lives by it...Basil, like today’s movements, was obliged to accept the fact that the movement to follow Christ radically cannot be completely merged with the local church”. It is not that the movement replaces but rather is a vitalising force within the local ecclesial structure.

Waves of Movements

In his historical review, Ratzinger mentions five waves of new movements that followed early monasticism – monasticism’s missionary outreach from the sixth century onwards (eg. the great Irish missionary movement); the reform movement of Cluny; the thirteenth century movements of Francis and Dominic; the sixteenth century movements of evangelization (the Jesuits and others); the nineteenth century’s primarily female missionary congregations.

Universal Movements in the local Church

That the movements of the Church have a universal significance can be seen particularly clearly in Francis. He didn’t want to establish an order (or to be closed up in monasteries as the clergy of Paris wanted the new evangelising movements at that time to be) but rather to renew the Church on the basis of the Gospel at a time when there was need of this. That the apostolic movements can be in a fruitful collaboration with the orders of the local churches can be seen in the missionary congregations of the 1800s (characterised especially by the women’s movement).

Ratzinger concludes: “If we look at the history of the Church as a whole, we see that the local Church, as that ecclesial form whose defining mark is the episcopal office, cannot but be the supporting structure that permanently upholds the edifice of the Church through all ages. On the other hand, the Church is also criss-crossed by successive waves of new movements, which reinvigorate the universalistic aspect of its apostolic mission and precisely in so doing also serve the spiritual vitality and truth of the local churches”.

The Need for Apostolic Movements

A constant in his review of history is to point to the need for apostolic movements within the very

constitution of the Church. The Petrine office itself would, he maintains, be understood incorrectly and would become a monstrous exception, if we burdened its bearer alone with the realization of the universal dimension of apostolic succession. As well as the sacramental-hierarchical ministry of the local churches, in the Church there are also always ministries and missions that serve universal mission and the spreading of the Gospel. It is the collaboration between the two kinds of ministries that completes the symphony of the Church's life. The primacy of the successor of Peter "exists in order to guarantee these essential components of the Church's life and to ensure their orderly relation with the local ecclesial structures".

Some Definitions

One final result from his historical research is the attempt to overcome the notoriously difficult issue of giving a definition of a movement! In order to do so, he makes interesting distinctions between "currents", "initiatives" and "movements". A current doesn't have an organisation as such as for example the liturgical movement or the Marian movement. Initiatives or specific actions, on the other hand, are something temporary such as petitions for the proclamation of a dogma or for changes in the Church. These distinctions pave the way for the definition of a movement. He comments: "Movements generally come from a charismatic leader and they take shape in concrete communities that live the whole gospel anew from this origin and recognise the Church without hesitation as the ground of their life, without which they could not exist".

John Paul II and the Movements

John Paul II's encouragement and promotion of the movements and new ecclesial communities will remain as one of the masterpieces of his pontificate. In emphasising the Vatican Council's rediscovery of the Church's charismatic dimension, John Paul II points to the significance of movements precisely because they arise from the communicative nature of a charism bestowed on a person. People are attracted by the founder's spiritual experience and it becomes their way to God. Attracted together by the founder's spiritual journey a spiritual affinity arises and from their friendship in Christ a movement comes to life.

Making sure Movements are taking the right road

Of course there are criteria of ecclesiality for these movements.[2] And John Paul II reminded the movements that to guarantee a charism's authenticity, in other words, to guarantee that it is taking the right road, every movement needs "to submit to the discernment of the competent ecclesiastical authority." The importance of all of this for John Paul II is that movements that are officially recognised by ecclesiastical authority offer themselves as forms of self-fulfilment and as reflections of the one Church.

Why the Movements today

For John Paul II, there is a timeliness in their contemporary appearance. Faced with secularised culture he sees so much need today for mature Christians who are conscious of their

baptismal identity, of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. And so at the Pentecost Vigil last year he comments: "There is great need for living Christian communities! And here are the movements and the new ecclesial communities: they are the response, given by the Holy Spirit, to this critical challenge at the end of the millennium".

As we have seen above he believes they now have reached a point of ecclesial maturity and he remarks that "the Church expects the 'mature' fruits of communion and commitment....." It is to this the Movements want to bear common witness.

A New Era Opening Up

Clearly, Pentecost '98 has heralded the opening of a new era for the Movements. It is a feature of that epochal point of transition throughout the whole Church in which the hour of unity has struck. Charism and institution, religious orders, movements and episcopacy are now meeting in communion. In the light of the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology, the dynamic between the Pope, apostolic movements and local churches is one of mutual love in the image of the Trinity. Working all together they bring about the full apostolicity of the Church.

Getting to Know One Another

This explains why a first feature in the new era opening up for the movements is *getting to know one another*. Communion is itself missionary and so there is always a need to build up communion. The discovery of a new-found lack of rivalry or competition between the movements makes for great joy. And meeting together is reinvigorating.

Common Witness

Secondly the new era opening up is one of *giving a common witness* together. In the epoch of the new evangelisation, the movements are one of the signs of hope present in the Church. They want to be and to speak together of their personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Through these movements there has been a rediscovery of baptismal vocation, a recognition of the Eucharist as source and summit of Christian life, wonderful Christian families have grown up, various forms of vocations have been followed, and it has been learned that faith is not abstract talk, nor vague religious sentiment, but new life in Christ. It would be for another article to elaborate upon these and the other novelties contained in these movements in varying degrees, such as the predominance of lay foundation and membership, the position of women, the aspect of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, the new forms of lay consecrated life, and the various social, political and economic projects.

Inter-relationship between Movements and Local Churches

On the specific issue of *the inter-relationship between the movements and the local churches*, Ratzinger offers the following advice: "Both sides must open themselves here to an education by the Holy Spirit and also by the leadership of the Church, both must acquire a selflessness...and learn from each other". The Movements have to be reminded that "they are a gift to and in the whole of the Church and must submit themselves to the demands of this

totality in order to be true to their own essence”.

But the local churches, too, even the bishops, must be reminded to “avoid making an ideal of uniformity in pastoral organization and planning. They must not make their own pastoral plans the criterion of what the Holy Spirit is allowed to do...It must not be the case that everything has to fit into a single, uniform organization. Better less organization and more spirit!” In this sense too he commented that just as vocations to the priesthood cannot be produced or established by administrative protocol, “it is all the more true that movements cannot be organized and planned by authority. They must be given, and they are given”.

Conclusion

Many of these movements have been present in Ireland since the 1970s onwards. Like infants, they are perhaps still learning to walk before they can run! But this year’s Pentecost gathering in Dublin is something of a milestone in their common witness and evangelisation. It was to this John Paul II pointed the movements in his concluding words at the Pentecost event last year: “Today, from this square, Christ says to each of you: ‘Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation’. He is counting on every one of you, and so is the Church. The Lord promises, ‘I am with you always to the close of the age’. I am with you”.

[1] For the published text see, “The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements”, *Communio* (Fall, 1998), 480-504. The citations from Ratzinger’s talk are taken from this published edition.

[2] *Christifideles Laici*, 30.