

CHARISMATICS AND EDUCATORS?

By WILLIAM HEWETT

A QUESTION MARK punctuates many books and articles about charismatics: Cardinal Suenens' *A New Pentecost?*; Simon Tugwell, Peter Hocken and others in *A New Heaven? A New Earth?*. This article is no exception. All I hope is that it raises more than the single question implied by the title and dispels some of the doubts of those who still prefer to think of themselves as non-charismatics; or who, like Congar, most reasonably refuse to be counted among the non-charismatics.

We are already in the land of semantics. Although it would be a pity to stay in this arid territory, some important questions about our two words — charismatics and educators — need to be asked before we attempt a betrothal, let alone a marriage. Definitions are unfashionable. Our attitude towards them will begin to betray our view of the proposed marriage between charismatics and educators, because definition belongs to a strictly classical or scholastic age, when words, like people, knew their place. Meaning was meaning; it did not change. Unfashionably I believe that definitions are valuable keys to the disclosure of meaning. Fashionably I believe that definitions are seldom coined once and for all; that if they are really there to foster growth in the knowledge of the contemporary and the eternal scenes, then we need to be prepared constantly to redefine. The usage and abuse of history not only wear out meanings; they add to, extend or simply change the grip of yesterday's meaning as it emerges, fails to emerge or bursts beyond today's meaning. Nor is this merely a pedantic parenthesis. Some degree of assent is needed at this stage before proceeding further. If the reader cannot give it, it will only harden his prejudices. Not that I intend to brainwash or proselytize; I shall be happy merely to have added to the number of those who are not unduly prejudiced in this matter.

For there are many question marks in my mind about charismatics and educators. Their marriage — if it is ever to get that far — will undoubtedly be a stormy one. But I am predisposed in favour of stormy marriages; the archetypal ones — Yahweh with Israel, Christ with his Church — are stormy enough and one would be worried if they were not. There are tensions; there are ambiguities; much has

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yet to be discovered. That is the very stuff of creative living; anything else, I suggest, would be living death. And one aim which both charismatics and educators ought to have in common should be to express enthusiasm for living, even stormily, rather than living death.

Of course both charismatics and educators have their seamy sides. But we do not have to imitate those sad people I met at a parent's morning in their son's classroom. They had no eyes for the exhibitions of art, history and technical drawing. I found them incongruously and uncomfortably on their knees before the waste-paper basket. Of course they found what they were looking for: many signs of adolescent callowness. What they missed was a delight in their son's growing creative efforts, which could have been found more easily and more immediately in front of their noses. Like characters out of Samuel Beckett one admires their unconventionality and recognizes the narrow truth they obscurely utter; but our world is bigger than a dust-bin and it need not become a cosmic refuse-tip — yet!

I therefore agree with Peter Hocken when he writes:

This task of identifying distinctive features [of pentecostalism] cannot be done from books [or dust-bins] alone. . . . The distinctive features here selected have been chosen as a result of participation, not merely observation. . . . The real test of what is here affirmed must be its correspondence with what Pentecostals of all shades do, not simply with what they think they do. . . .¹

Father Hocken is not being as over-subtle as he may seem at first sight. On the contrary he is showing the simple attitude, to which many of us pay lip service without actually practising it. He is discerning what is actually there and not simply what appears to be there. Among other elements he finds: the rediscovery of *charismata pneumatika*; 'the restoration of extraordinary gifts as part of normal church life that can be understood theologically as the reactivation in the christian community of levels and capacities of the human spirit that have long lain dormant in christian life'.² It is tempting to quote Hocken at length on this fundamental feature of the charismatic movement, but space permits only this summary:

The objections to a rigid categorization within the christian life, dividing those filled with the Spirit from the converted not yet filled, are basically psychological; that is to say that the levels or layers of the

¹ Simon Tugwell, Peter Hocken and others: *New Heaven? New Earth?* (London, 1976), p 20.

² *Op. cit.*, p 22.

human are not so mutually exclusive as such a theory presupposes, nor is there only one road into the depths of man.³

The rediscovery of *charismata pneumatika* . . . does seem to generate an awareness of all christian life as gift and so promote a recognition of endowments already operative as also being *charismata*.⁴

This is a good commentary on Congar's famous statement that he did not want to be counted among the non-charismatics. But in following this line of argument has not Hocken so deflated charismatic exclusiveness as to make us all more or less anonymous charismatics? If we are looking for classical definitions then he probably has; but if we are looking for the qualities which charismatics pre-eminently, though not exclusively, express, then the barrier presented by this objection can be raised. Hocken has much to teach even the teachers about what we can all qualitatively hope for by contact with charismatics: receiving God's word, not once and for all, but as constantly uttered and renewed; the widening of the concept of healing, not to oust doctors, but to include all the liberating and transforming works of God's Spirit in the whole range of its psychosomatic actuality; bringing closer together outward sign and inner reality, particularly in liturgical and sacramental expression; the re-emphasis on experience leading to a heightened appreciation of discernment, which in turn leads to doctrinal orthodoxy understood not merely as definition, but as part of something much greater 'namely the determination of what God is doing here and now'.⁵ We may lack crisp definition here, but as a description of what is actually emerging in the here and now under the charismatic umbrella it surely merits the consideration of educators.

The word 'educator' can also be broad or narrow, clean or dirty, final or changing, according to the way in which it has been shaped by history, our own upbringing and a thousand other factors. I suspect that the tensions in the world of educators are every bit as strong as those within the churches and for somewhat similar reasons. The conservative handers-on of tradition rub shoulders with or shake fists at the socializers for the future, who seem to be building on the destruction of the past. I refuse to be counted among the non-builders of the future and equally strongly refuse to be relegated merely to the past. And in my experience and my professions I am both churchman and

³ *Op. cit.*, p 24.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p 35.

educator. My only course is to break through into that unique land, where God's likeness is always to be found: the present. There the best of the past and the future can meet in creative growth if only we can let go and be still for a moment and be present to the riches of their mutual compatibilities. Of course education is handing on the past; of course it is preparing for the future; but neither of these admirable aims is achieved save in the here and now.

Let us bring together, in the imagination and for a few moments, these two richly endowed, but often muddled and often too distinct, clusters of meaning. Let charismatics and educators, like great crested grebes in April, display their gifts on a wide expanse of water, forgetting for a few precious moments prejudices from the past and responsibilities for the future; forgetting even their super-egos and lesser selves in the experience of a joyous present betrothal. In this way we can taste a little of the supreme quality that educators and charismatics can show when they are at their best: their immediacy, their positive delight in being together, now formally, now informally, now converging, now diverging, now loving, now learning, now praising, now reverencing; but all upon the living waters of the present and in the joy of being now.

One may not like this language; we are free to use or create others. One may sense the fragility and impermanence of picturing the betrothal in this way; the rosiest dawns and the reddest sunsets are no less beautiful for their impermanence. And one may express a thousand other fears and regrets about the lacks and lurking dangers among charismatics and educators. But while they are here and meeting — and they are — why not share, like the surfer in the wave as it rolls, why not dance like the grebes on the waters of the now?

'This talk of beauty and enthusiasm, sex and celebration', I can hear an educator say: 'Where is it all leading? And is it responsible? How will it fit into the curriculum? All right for us when we let our hair down at conferences or our minds loose in learned journals; but in practice, in the classroom, actually to express who we are and how we feel; that's another thing. That could be dangerous. . . .' It's strange, isn't it, how for centuries we teachers and churchmen have risked boring the pants off our congregations and classes; neither bishops nor headmasters have shown visible signs of concern. But let the merest whisper of enthusiasm loose and their dogmatic slumbers are immediately disturbed. This is not another round of that tedious old game of bishop bashing, mixed now with headmaster baiting, both of which tend merely to abuse. I am angry with neither,

though I have suffered under both, because my memories *are* healed. Thanks to his healing presence I no longer need the crutch of bitterness or the cry of hate. Like the clown I hope increasingly to become, I want to expose the anomaly and also to heal the hypocrisy. For too long we have taken the risk and the responsibility for scarring souls with binding fears and bored them away from the parody of christian belief, we so insensitively purveyed, into more lively modes of non-christian commitment. Why shy away, in the name of responsibility, from the immediate, the joyful, the healing in the fragile now? Why not tease out together — or ‘discern’ if you prefer — the raw materials of the real experience of the now? And if that experience already contains a hint of honest feeling and a glint of real joy, maybe the gaps have not closed on God after all and the now *is disclosing* his presence. Unless we are communicating this reality to those we teach we shall continue merely to bore or crush with impossible oughts and unchristian fears. While deluding ourselves that we are handing on the christian tradition, we shall quench once more the Spirit who is the relish of the God who is now.

The weary historian will say that he has seen it all before; the wary theologian will protest that he does not want to see it again. The more discerning will note that these people’s disillusionment, far from being too far gone, has not gone far enough. They still cling to that basic illusion and fundamental act of idolatry that so many institutions forget to guard against. They are jaded and jaundiced because they think that religion and education are almost exclusively about permanent states, final structures and definitive statements. They know enthusiasm cannot last and cannot therefore fit into their strong, though arid, fortress. They therefore dismiss it as so much froth and bubble before retiring once again into their serious and barren deserts, and burying their heads therein.

The young, whom we profess to be educating, evangelizing and leading through and out of — not just into — desert temptations are more discerning. They do not need to be told *about* the value of experience: they delight in experiencing. They do not want to hear *about* the healing power of the Spirit; they delight in its working. They do not want to hear *about* the value of small groups and prayer; they enjoy being in a group and sharing with all-comers, even priests and teachers, its happening. This is not empty rhetoric; my evidence is my experience — with them. Like the blind man whose sight Jesus restored, the experience of the happening is its own undeniable authentication, no matter who scorns or tries to devalue or deny.

What a pity it would be if this youthful enthusiasm, with all its genuineness, were to harden into aggressive fundamentalism, because those who should be wiser — teachers and priests — failed to take the first step in all discerning: to see that the presence of the good Spirit is recognized in the qualities of wholeheartedness and courage in and despite the impermanence and fragility.

This ability to discern the Spirit, to recognize his presence and delight in it, should be the peculiar and particular gift of Jesuits to the world, particularly the world of education. It was pre-eminently the 'charism' of the founder; it is the *sine qua non* for giving the Spiritual Exercises, which are themselves the heart of a Jesuit's own training and teaching. This is said in no spirit of triumphalism, but rather in a sober spirit of recognition of a responsibility too often brushed aside. Dominicans — like Congar — can refuse to be counted among the non-charismatics. Jesuits cannot afford this luxury; they cannot but be charismatics of a sort, however anonymous they try to be. It is part of the permanent nature of the beast, misuse it as he may. And this charism of Ignatius is equally the inheritance of many other religious and layfolk.

Coming down to the specific english-speaking tradition we are trying to hand on, most of us would be surprised to learn that, in spite of our quenchings, it conceals a strong charismatic element. Dr John Bossy in his book⁶ makes this apparent in a number of ways. From the first pages he argues convincingly that we have as a group been *too* selective in the traditions we have handed on: thirteenth-century scholasticism, sixteenth-century martyrs and nineteenth-century potato fields are all too artificial substitutes for a tradition that could *sustain* instead of sending us out ill-fitted for our present times.⁷ He shows that the notorious Fr Robert Parsons was far from being a merely political manipulator. Parsons emerges much more as a charismatic with an extraordinarily modern resonance; a revivalist indeed and no mere survivalist; a critic of the marian régime precisely for failing to renew the Spirit, being content with 'a stage play where men do change their persons and their parts without changing their minds or affections'.⁸ In later centuries the alliance that appeared between Catholics and Quakers, especially in Lancashire, not only in opposition to the establishment, but in mutual recognition of common

⁶ Bossy, John: *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850* (London, 1975).

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p 1.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p 17.

springs of spirituality, supports Bossy's conclusion: that Catholics of the english-speaking tradition would be wiser to think less about everyone else as non-Catholics and more about themselves as non-conformists.⁹ This would be truer to the *concrete* catholic tradition in England; and truer too to its charismatic element.

History, even in such brilliant hands and with such well-documented sources, is still a notoriously waxen authority. We can with minimal skill push its nose in many directions and delude ourselves that we are discerning. Perhaps more relevant to our search and less open to tendentious interpretation is the attempt to discern the signs of our present times. Bernard Lonergan, in one of his more immediately available essays,¹⁰ frames our present understanding and speaks implicitly both to charismatics and to educators.

The classical mediation of meaning has broken down; the breakdown has been affected by a whole array of new and more effective techniques; but their very multiplicity leaves us bewildered . . . dreading lest we fall victim to the up-to-date myth of ideology. . . .¹¹

Lonergan goes on to make a plea for an intermediate re-definition of man that does greater justice to his symbolizing, poetic, creative and spontaneous nature. Without denying its truth and without failing to praise its value in its day he lays aside the constrictions of an obsolescent classical definition.

The bodily presence of another is the presence of the incarnate spirit of the other; and the incarnate spirit reveals itself to me by every shift of eyes, countenance, colour, lips, voice, tone, fingers, hands, arms, stance. Such revelation is not an object to be apprehended. Rather it works immediately upon my subjectivity to make me share the other's seriousness or vivacity, ease or embarrassment, joy or sorrow; and similarly my response affects his subjectivity, leads him on to say more; or quietly and imperceptibly rebuffs him, holds him off, closes the door.¹²

For those who are merely conservative the breakdown of classicism is a cause for lament. For those who are merely revolutionary it is a source of gladness. For the charismatic educator the occasion is much more significant; it is the situation in which we are and therefore the only one in which we can respond. Love it or hate it, be glad or downcast these are just irresponsible affections if they do not arise

⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp 394-96.

¹⁰ Lonergan, Bernard: *Collection*, ed. F. E. Crowe (London, 1967).

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, ch 16, 'Dimensions of Meaning'.

¹² *Loc. cit.*,

out of the living reality that is now. At the root of orthodoxy and orthopraxis there must be that genuineness of response in actual present experience, out of which creeds and actions spring. If the 'affections' are disordered — curved in on themselves instead of outwards in love — then no amount of so-called education in orthodoxy or orthopraxis will communicate that 'end experience', which is the really ultimate meaning of every now. Classical educators, like their counterpart classical theologians, were for better or for worse more concerned about right ideas than rightly ordered affections. For better or for worse their day is over. The right ordering of the affections and their varied expression in the here and now is the point at which post-classical educators and post-classical charismatics can most fruitfully meet. It may be that they have not coincided since the early cistercian experience of the twelfth century or the early jesuit experience of the sixteenth. Now they have an opportunity that has not been open to them for centuries.

The surprising but undeniable fact in the shape of the Church, emerging from the past and merging into an unknown future, is the affective presence of the Spirit: *the* gift from which all others flow; that cinderella third member, always neglected but like beauty always under our noses, if only we would let go and let ourselves breathe, taste and see with inward vision surfacing to a variety of expression. This is where charismatics and educators can meet; in this immediacy of sharing, this mutuality of edification; not 'us and them', but 'I-thou' in the Spirit; in the now.

The future of the Church cannot be planned and built up merely by the application of generally recognized christian principles; it needs the courage of an ultimately charismatically inspired, creative imagination. . . .¹³

So speaks Rahner in *The Shape of the Church to Come*. And again in a more rhetorical but no less profound passage he pleads:

Where do men speak of the commandments of God, not as a duty to be observed, but as a glorious liberation of man from the enslavement of mortal fear and frustrating egoism? Where in the Church do people not only pray but experience prayer as the pentecostal gift of the Spirit, as glorious grace? Where beyond all rational indoctrination of God's existence is there an initiation into the mystery of that living experience which arises from the centre of our existence.¹⁴

¹³ Rahner, Karl: *The Shape of the Church to Come* (London, 1974), p 40.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p 85.

In many charismatic groups, certainly; but in our schools? The question mark is not rhetorical, nor is it meant to shame, but simply to do what question marks are meant to do: to raise the question . . . and, I hope, the wind!

But if pragmatic and busy teachers are wary of mystical Germans, they can hardly be unaware of the report of the joint working party on pastoral strategy, which has recently appeared with the title *A Time for Building*. Let me quote from the heart of the document:

Among the most important means of achieving christian formation is the small group. There already exist many groups doing excellent work, helping to form better christians, but there is no overall strategy for this work. We believe that one of the most significant developments in the Church will be the emergence of very many small groups, and we foresee them playing a vital role in pastoral strategy.¹⁵

I find that if I line up that innocent little paragraph with other bits and pieces whirling around in what I call my mind, link it with odd smatterings of history, psychology, and above all experience, paste all this on to the subject of this article, then a shattering and illuminating flash of insight into the obvious bursts forth: small is beautiful.¹⁶ 'Technological dimensions which fit simultaneously the three criteria of ecological cleanliness, sociological fairness and psychological desirability are within a human rather than a cosmic range'.¹⁷ No wonder Jesus chose only twelve and said: where two or three — and not too many more — are gathered together in my name there I am in the midst of them; urged us to look at small and beautiful beings like lillies and birds and to think about how trees grow from small seeds. Perhaps it takes a universe grown unimaginably large and a global population televisually starving to bring belatedly home to us the value of the immediate neighbourhood and the local meaning of what is in fact under our very eyes. Despite the ever-vaster context, 'now' is still the same size and so, more or less, are we. The pressures are greater and so are the possibilities; but they all start, as they will all end, in the small but everlasting moment that is now; where small groups meet, are open to one another in their praying in his presence, in their being, in his Being, in their sharing — now and here.

¹⁵ *Report of the Joint Working Party on Pastoral Strategy* (London, 1976), p 54.

¹⁶ Schumacher, F. E.: *Small is Beautiful* (London, 1973).

¹⁷ Illich, Ivan and Verne, Etienne: *Imprisoned in the Classroom* (London, 1976), p 54.

Perhaps after all charismatics and educators are ripe for marriage; but it must be a true, inward meeting. It must not be a mere, external imitation of what classical pentecostals do or did. Nor, on the other hand, must it be a one-sided affair, in which one group complacently claims to have nothing new to learn, because they already possess it implicitly in their own traditions. What is essential — and this is why size really is a vital consideration — is that meetings between educators and charismatics should nearly always be small and unpretentious and thus open to the new beginning in every now. For the beauty *is* the smallness, the size is the sharing, the few *are* chosen and the many *are* one, only if we really do become like little children and begin again to grow. This does not mean regression to aggressive gangs; but it can mean the creative meeting of simple enthusiasm and wise maturity in the growing emergence of small cells, where salvation and healing, prayer and atonement can, not only happen, but be seen and shared in their delightful happening; where we are 'I and thou' not 'us and them'; where personal initiatives are not swamped by anonymous institutions; where neighbourhoods and classrooms begin again to come to life from where they actually are; where even the smallest talent and strangest tongue are heard and responded to and thus grow towards a greater glory.

But we must not let that greater glory quench the initial glory of the small groups and the small moments, where Jesus walks again with his disciples to Emmaus, and God with Adam in his own small garden, and the Spirit breathes where he chooses in small places and simple, unexpected ways. Why should the Marxists have a monopoly of small groups? Charismatics and educators of our present world unite! For the intermediate glory!