

CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

Constantine B. Fernandez[♦]

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) began two years after the end of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and 70 years after the encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII on the Holy Spirit, *Divinum Illud Munus*. It is one of the fruits of Pope John XXIII throwing open the windows of the Church to let the strong breath of God renew the Church. In preparation for the Second Vatican Council (formally convoked on 25th December, 1961 and commenced on 11th October, 1962), the Pope asked all the faithful to pray for a new Pentecostal “outpouring of the Holy Spirit”. The Pope wished and prayed that a holy wind would sweep away the deadness and release a new and refreshing renewal in the Church. In 1967, ‘a new springtime’ in the church was ushered in by the powerful and transforming experience of a group of students of Duquesne University, run by the Holy Ghost Fathers, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, USA. Since then, millions of Catholics in about 120 countries of the world have been experiencing a remarkable spiritual renewal of their Christian lives, together with many charismatic gifts of the Spirit. “We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit,” declared Pope Paul VI in 1976 in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, foreseeing the springtime in the Church.

Among the participants in this fastest-spreading post-Vatican Second renewal are found laymen and laywomen, religious sisters and brothers, priests and bishops. Estimates of the total number of

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Catholics involved in or influenced by the Renewal is somewhere between 120-150 million worldwide. Pope John Paul II, speaking to the participants of the Sixth International Charismatic Leaders' Conference in Rome on 15th May, 1987 said:

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church. The vigour and fruitfulness of the renewal certainly attest to the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church in these years after Second Vatican council. Of course, the Spirit has guided the Church in every age, producing a great variety of gifts among the faithful. Because of the Spirit, the Church preserves a continual youthful vitality, and the Charismatic Renewal is an eloquent manifestation of this vitality today, a bold statement of what "the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 2:7) as we approach the close of the Second Millennium.¹

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal has succeeded in ushering in a new springtime during the last four decades of its powerful presence in the Church. Therefore the CCR is seen to be '*a current of grace*' flowing through the entire People of God, opening them to a fresh outpouring of God's Holy Spirit, and enabling them to place the whole of their lives under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They have discovered anew the spiritual riches of the Church and are filled with the desire to 'spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere' (2 Cor 2:14).

1. CCR in India

In India, the CCR began first in Bombay in February 1972 with several persons receiving a charismatic "Baptism in the Spirit" either spontaneously in prayer, or through the influence of other Catholics who had got involved in the CCR abroad. Four or five prayer groups sprang up in the city that first year, and within two years there were about twenty-five prayer groups in the city. Individuals and teams from these groups were invited to other dioceses for retreats, and so the CCR began spreading rapidly throughout the country, and most widely in Kerala and Goa.

A National Office was started in Bombay in 1974, and it organized the First National Convention in Bombay, and also started publishing the national magazine, CHARISINDIA, which today is recognized as one of the best Catholic magazines both in the country and abroad. In 1977, a National Service Team (NST) was elected by the First National Leaders Conference held in Bangalore, and attended by leaders of the

¹L'Osservatore Romano, 15-5-87.

then-existing charismatic groups of India. Fr. Fio Mascarenhas S.J. was elected the first chairman of the NST, and Archbishop S. Arulappa of Hyderabad agreed to be its first Episcopal Advisor.

In October 1980, Fr. Gino Henriques, C.Ss.R., was elected the NST Chairman, to succeed Fr. Fio who was called by Cardinal Suenens to head the International Office in Brussels. In 1984, Fr. Gino moved the National Office to Bangalore. At this time Bishop Valerian D'Souza of Pune succeeded Abp. Arulappa as Episcopal Advisor of the NST. In 1989, Fr. A.J. Thamburaj, S.J. became Chairman of NST. In 1993, the Chairmanship of NST was once again vested on Fr. Fio Mascarenhas. While Bishop Gali Bali of Guntur succeeded the Bishop of Pune as the Episcopal Advisor. Cyril John was elected the first layman Chairman of NST in the year 2001 and Bishop Valerian D'Souza once again took over as Episcopal Advisor. In 2010, Prof. Constantine B Fernandez was chosen to be the Chairman of NST.

Meanwhile, the CCR has spread to most dioceses of India. Fourteen National Conventions have been held, and many language conventions in the regions have taken place. Some of these conventions have drawn as many as 40,000 people. CCR in India has regular programmes to touch all the states of life by regularly conducting Retreats for Bishops and Priests, Religious, Seminarians and Formators, Couples, Youth, Teenagers, Business men, Nurses, Teachers, Professionals. The NST also organizes regular training programmes in Leadership, Intercession and Charisms. The National Charismatic Office also has a perpetual intercession center. At present the National Charismatic Office and the National Intercession Center are situated at BA-274, Tagore Gardens, New Delhi 110027.

The Main Goals

The central goals of the CCR are:

1. To help Catholics experience an intense love for and commitment to Jesus as one's personal Saviour and Lord, a childlike trust in God the Father, an openness to the guidance and gifts of the Holy spirit and a warm commitment to the Body of Christ, the Church.
2. To help Catholics understand and use the charismatic gifts, which are a source of strength for Christians in the carrying out of their mission and their pilgrimage towards holiness.
3. To help Catholics rediscover the beauty and power of prayer, both collective and personal, with special emphasis on the prayer of praise,

faith filled intercession and participation in a weekly prayer meeting with fellow believers.

4. To promote evangelization in the power of the Holy Spirit by proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed and by bearing witness to Jesus Christ through personal testimony and those works of faith and justice to which each one is called.

5. To foster an ongoing growth in holiness through the proper integration of these charismatic emphases with the full life of the Church through participation in a rich sacramental and liturgical life, appreciation of the tradition of Catholic prayer and spirituality, ongoing formation in Catholic doctrine and participation in the pastoral plan of the local Church.

That these goals are being reached has been recognized by many of the Catholic Bishop's Conferences around the world and in one of their Pastoral Statements on CCR it is said:

Many lives have undergone a deep conversion, and have radically reoriented themselves toward God... Many have rediscovered the meaning of Church, Eucharistic Life, Mary's role, and the ancient discipline of fasting... Many too have rediscovered the centrality of the cross, which remains at the heart of Christian discipleship even after the glory of the resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit.²

In 1992, on the 25th anniversary of the Renewal, Pope John Paul II said: "I willingly join you in giving praise to God for the many fruits it has borne in the life of the Church. The emergence of CCR following the Second Vatican Council was a particular gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church."³ In 2001, the Pope wrote, "For this is what the saints are: people who have fallen in love with Christ. And this is why the Charismatic Renewal has been such a gift to the Church: it has led a host of men and women, young and old, into this experience of the love which is stronger than death."⁴ Today, therefore, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal stands humbly at the heart of the life of the Church. CCR is not para-Church somewhere on the fringes – it is at the pulsating heart of the Church.

²Catholic Bishops' Conference of the U.S.A – Pastoral Statement on the CCR (1984)

³John Paul II, Audience with the ICCRO Council, Rome, 14th March, 1992, "Then Peter Stood up...", 55

⁴John Paul II, Message to the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant communities and Fellowships, Rome, 22nd June, 2001, "Then Peter Stood up...", Updated address from 2000 to 2005, 11.