

THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

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The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) is not a single unified worldwide movement like many other new movements in the Church. It does not have a founder or a group of founders but it is rather a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. The grace of Charismatic Renewal flowed out from Vatican II. In preparation for this momentous Council, Pope John XXIII had prayed the prayer; 'Renew your wonders in this our day as by a new Pentecost...' Two years after the end of Vatican II we saw the rather spontaneous birth of Catholic Pentecostalism or what we now know as Catholic Charismatic Renewal. The origins are usually cited as a student retreat in 1967 at Duquesne University in Pittsburg Pennsylvania, USA. The students were reflecting upon Acts Chapters 1-4 and praying the '*Veni Creator Spiritus*'. In the course of the retreat they experienced an extra-ordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, they went on to testify that they had never before experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, the love of God and joy in their hearts as they did that day. This experience which became known as the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' was the beginning of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. The fire began to rapidly spread initially in the US but then to other continents. Today it is estimated that there are 120 million people who would testify to a life-changing experience of the Holy Spirit through their contact with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

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The central grace of Charismatic Renewal has been described in a number of ways; such as, baptism in the Holy Spirit, the release of the Holy Spirit or the out-pouring/effusion of the Holy Spirit. In a clear and deliberate act of surrender, we invite the Holy Spirit to take control of our lives. In this way there is a personal Pentecost where the presence of the Holy Spirit brings alive in new ways the graces of our baptism and Confirmation. The Holy Spirit not only releases the sacramental graces that have already been received but there is also a new out-pouring of the Spirit to equip us with his gifts for service and mission. However, Charismatic Renewal does not just focus upon personal conversion but sees this as a fundamental key to the renewal of the entire Church and to the transformation of the world. Obviously, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal does not have a monopoly of the grace of Pentecost and any hints of elitism are to be avoided. The central vision of the Renewal is to promote 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' as something which is offered to everyone. It is not given to make us superior Christians it is given to equip us for the mission of the entire Church.

In a sense, the goals of Charismatic Renewal are the same as the objectives of the whole Church. The CCR seeks the conversion, salvation and sanctification of all people, and their unification into an effective assembly of God's people. Whilst there is a strong emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit it is also a 'Trinitarian Renewal.' People come to know God as a loving and forgiving Father, they enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour as well as becoming aware that they are Temples of the Holy Spirit. From this place of conversion, the Word of God becomes more fully 'alive and active', there is a deeper call to prayer and worship, a strong realisation of the need to build the community of the Church and a deeper desire to evangelise in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Charismatic Renewal is not a movement in the sense of a structured organisation. It has no rule of life or written constitution. It embraces clergy, religious and laity and as such is a gift to the whole Church. Due to its flexible nature, there are many forms in which CCR exists in the Church. Two of the most common ways are through prayer groups which are often, but not exclusively, Parish based and through Covenant Communities. Prayer groups have been described as the 'living stones' of the Renewal. They are places where people can encounter the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' often through the 'Life in the Spirit Seminars' and then importantly the prayer meetings help to keep alive or fan into a flame the effects of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The prayer meeting is primarily a place of praise worship where there is some teaching and fellowship. Faith can be shared and nurtured and people can be equipped and empowered for

evangelisation. From the beginning of Charismatic Renewal some people felt called into a deeper expression of community and a number of Covenant Communities began to emerge. Whilst being rooted in the graces and spirituality of the Charismatic Renewal many of the Covenant Communities also have their own particular charisms and mission.

Clearly, the Charismatic Renewal embraces a wide variety of expressions, ministries and initiatives that are all inspired by the Holy Spirit. CCR is present at local, diocesan, national and international levels. One of the 'Fathers' of Charismatic Renewal, Cardinal Suenens wrote; *'To interpret the Renewal as a movement among other movements is to misunderstand its nature; it is a movement of the Spirit offered to the entire Church and destined to rejuvenate every part of the Church's life'*. Indeed CCR has much to offer to the Church as a whole, primarily by the importance of people's faith becoming alive through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Obviously this fosters a renewed appreciation of the sacraments, a deeper commitment to prayer and the Word of God, a rediscovery of the importance of the charismatic gifts, a desire to grow in fellowship and build community. Importantly, Charismatic Renewal has helped the emergence of a mature and formed lay leadership in the Church. It has also harnessed and mobilized a new zeal for evangelisation. Ultimately, this has led to a profound attachment and love of the Institutional Church and faithfulness to the Magisterium.

At the beginning of this millennium, Pope John Paul II presented his manifesto in *'Novo Millennio Ineunte'*. This text contained two central themes, the universal call to holiness and the call to new evangelisation. Both of these calls are central in Charismatic Renewal. The experience of a personal Pentecost leads to growth in holiness and then the graces of Pentecost equip and empower people for mission. It is so encouraging to see the wide variety of missionary endeavours in different parts of the world that have been inspired by the Holy Spirit and carried out by people in CCR. These range from evangelistic missions to unreached people groups in the Amazon, to medical and educational assistance being given to the poorest of the poor in many parts of the world, to dialogues promoting Kingdom values with politicians, and economists, and engaging in works that support and promote the Culture of Life.

Over the past 43 years CCR has passed through various stages of development. In some countries it is a relatively new phenomenon, in other places it is growing rapidly whilst in some other situations it has reached a place of maturity. The challenge for all those involved is that we should keep moving forward as the Spirit leads and always remain open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.