

THE ASSETS AND LIABILITIES OF THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

Jessica J. G. Dennis

November 10, 2010

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
- II. What is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal?
  - A. Definition
  - B. Goals
  - C. History
- III. Effects of the Renewal
  - A. The Central Role of “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”
  - B. The Fruits of “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”
- IV. Interpretations of the Renewal
- V. Critiques of the Renewal
  - A. Emotionalism
  - B. Fundamentalism
- VI. Conclusion

## Introduction

Over 43 years have passed since the Catholic Charismatic Renewal began in 1967. Reactions to the renewal have been mixed. While many Catholics, along with several popes, have responded enthusiastically to this lay ecclesial movement, many critiques have also been raised. What remains undisputed is the meaningful role the laity can play in the Church, and the boundless ways the Spirit moves among God's people.

### What is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal?

#### Definition

According to Paul Josef Cordes, "The Charismatic Renewal has been described as an experiential discovery of the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in her individual members."<sup>1</sup> As stated on the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS) website,

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is not a single, unified worldwide movement. It does not have a single founder or group of founders as many other movements do. It has no membership lists. It is a highly diverse collection of individuals, groups and activities - covenant communities, prayer groups, small faith sharing groups, renewed parishes, conferences, retreats, and even involvement in various apostolates and ministries -, often quite independent of one another, in different stages and modes of development and with different emphases, that nevertheless share the same fundamental experience and espouse the same general goals.<sup>2</sup>

While the Charismatic Renewal is manifested in a diverse number of ways, common to each manifestation is the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," an experience described as a "new, powerful, and life-transforming outpouring of the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup> Details concerning the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" will be discussed in a subsequent section of this paper.

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Josef Cordes, *Call to Holiness: Reflections on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>2</sup> "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal," International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, accessed November 7, 2010, <http://iccrs.org/index.php/ccr>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Goals

While the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (hereafter, the CCR or the Renewal) “did not originate by the adoption of any formal goals,”<sup>4</sup> literature from the early years of the movement point to its ideological focus: renewal, a term which, according to researchers Bord & Faulkner, refers to “an overall spiritual regeneration of a dying institutional church—a church suffering a ‘crisis of faith.’”<sup>5</sup> In the Renewal’s early stages, “Church leadership in general [was] viewed as having capitulated to secularism and as having lost the vision and reality of the resurrected Christ.”<sup>6</sup> While “proclamation of the Gospel may have always been accepted as a major function of the church,” in the eyes of the CCR, “the church [had] failed to direct its energies toward accomplishing this goal.”<sup>7</sup>

In an article called “The State of the Catholic Church,” Ralph Martin, one of the leaders of the Renewal while affirming the strengths of the Catholic Church, goes on to name several critiques:

1. The church has not effectively developed true conversion of faith commitment in its members – the term “baptized pagans” is used to characterize the bulk of church members.
2. Catholic experience is one of individual struggle minus the support of a true community; the institutional church has failed in its attempts to generate a sense of community.
3. The church has not provided effective, scripturally based teaching to combat the deterioration of family life.
4. Church leadership has been overly influenced by secular knowledge and has thereby become ineffectual. Leadership must be granted to those, both lay and cleric, who are truly committed to a scripturally based church.
5. Modern theology has capitulated to secular theories of human behavior and functioning and has lost the vision provided by Scripture. This capitulation to secular theory has resulted in a powerless and error-filled theology.<sup>8</sup>

In light of these critiques, the CCR believes that “the very point of this movement is the personal intervention of God in the lives of his people.”<sup>9</sup> In the eyes of the Renewal, “God will

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Bord and Joseph E. Faulkner, *The Catholic Charismatics: The Anatomy of a Modern Religious Movement* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 128.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

intervene in the lives of his people when they are made aware of the message of the gospel – the call to commitment to Jesus Christ as savior.”<sup>10</sup> According to CCR leader Ralph Martin, this message is one of “repentance, of faith, of baptism, of the gift of the Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> As such, one of the goals of the Renewal is the preaching of this message, the focus of the Renewal’s activities is evangelism.<sup>12</sup> In a 1993, “some leaders have suggested that the goal of the renewal is the renewal of the Church so that the whole Church is renewed charismatically and no longer needs a distinct movement.”<sup>13</sup>

Since the very beginning, “CCR leaders have taken great pains to establish ongoing, amicable relationships with the church hierarchy” even in the face of “cool indifference or outright hostility, especially from parish priests.”<sup>14</sup> It has been made clear that the leaders “do not want the movement identified with any sectarian, separatist emphasis” and “are quick to point out that membership in the CCR often results in even greater church allegiance than existed prior to such membership.”<sup>15</sup>

According to *Toward a New Pentecost*, the CCR “wishes to continue the Catholic tradition which calls all to conversion and renewal.”<sup>16</sup> It is clear that the CCR identifies its work with the work of the prophets:

Whatever differences there are between the charismatic renewal and earlier renewals, the charismatic renewal stands and wishes to stand in the Catholic tradition which gave birth to the itinerant prophets of the ancient Church, the preaching apostolate of the mendicant orders in the Middle Ages, the Exercises of St. Ignatius, the giving of parish missions, the liturgical, and other apostolic and spiritual movements. Though

---

<sup>9</sup> O’Connor, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*, quoted in Bord and Faulkner, *The Catholic Charismatics*, 129.

<sup>10</sup> Bord and Faulkner, *The Catholic Charismatics*, 130.

<sup>11</sup> Martin, *Unless the Lord Build the House*, quoted in Bord and Faulkner, *The Catholic Charismatics*, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Bord and Faulkner, *The Catholic Charismatics*, 130.

<sup>13</sup> Ghezzi, “The End of the Catholic Pentecostal Movement,” quoted in Killian McDonnell, ed., *Toward a New Pentecost For a New Evangelization: Malines Document I, 2nd edition* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Bord and Faulkner, *The Catholic Charismatics*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> McDonnell, *Toward a New Pentecost*, 4.

its accents differ, the charismatic renewal wishes to issue the same call to conversion to all persons and to renew the ‘unbelieving believer’ who is hindered by an atheism of the understanding and of the heart.<sup>17</sup>

## History

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal generally recognizes its beginnings in February 1967 at a weekend retreat for college students at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.<sup>18</sup> For most of the weekend, the retreatants – a group of Catholic professors and students – prayed for God “to allow them to experience the grace of both baptism and confirmation.”<sup>19</sup> At the retreat, they “experienced a striking spiritual renewal accompanied by a manifestation of the charisms of the Spirit, including, but not limited to, those listed in 1 Corinthians 12.”<sup>20</sup> This “powerful and transforming experience of God” came to be known as ‘baptism in the Spirit,’ and the account of the weekend “quickly spread across the college campus, then to other campuses around the country.”<sup>21</sup> One of the retreatants at the Duquesne Weekend writes, “This was the first event at which a group of Catholics experienced the Baptism in the Spirit and the charismatic gifts. While there may have been Catholics who were baptized in the Spirit prior to the Duquesne Weekend, this retreat began a widespread movement of Catholic Charismatic Renewal throughout the United States and around the world.”<sup>22</sup>

Following the Duquesne Weekend, the charismatic experience quickly spread from college campuses to parishes and other Catholic institutions.<sup>23</sup> Those involved in the Renewal created networks and organizations, and began to offer Catholic charismatic conferences. In the

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Damien McGrath, “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 7 (1974): 30.

<sup>19</sup> “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal.”

<sup>20</sup> McDonnell, *Toward a New Pentecost*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal.”

<sup>22</sup> Patti Gallagher Mansfield, *As By A New Pentecost: The Dramatic Beginning of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (Steubenville: Franciscan University Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>23</sup> “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal.”

mid-1970s, a conference held at Notre Dame University's campus in South Bend, Indiana attracted more than 30,000 people.<sup>24</sup>

Subsequently, the Catholic Church began to take notice of the Charismatic Renewal and in 1973, CCR leaders received words of encouragement in an address from Pope Paul VI on the occasion of the First International Leaders' Conference for leaders of the Renewal.<sup>25</sup> In 1975, CCR leaders met with Pope Paul VI and met several times with Pope John Paul II.<sup>26</sup> The Renewal has also received several pastoral letters of encouragement from several of the bishops' conferences of various countries in support of the movement.<sup>27</sup>

Since 1967, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has come to be present in "220 countries and has touched the lives of over 120 million Catholics. In some countries the number of participants seems to have diminished in recent years, while in other places the number continues to rise at an amazing rate."<sup>28</sup>

### Effects of the Renewal

According to *Toward a New Pentecost*, "even those not involved in this particular renewal have remarked on the evident change it has effected in the lives of those who have associated themselves with it."<sup>29</sup> In its early years, Pope Paul VI "praised the various forms of renewal of spiritual life with their taste for deep personal and communal prayer, a return to contemplation and accent on praise; the desire to give oneself totally to Christ and be open to the

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> McDonnell, *Toward a New Pentecost*, 1.

spirit, with scripture reading and brotherly devotion, with the will to bring greater cooperation into the service of the Church.”<sup>30</sup>

### The Central Role of “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”

For many involved in the Renewal, the spiritual renewal that takes place is one of is associated with the experience commonly referred to as “Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” or the “Outpouring of the Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> According to Cordes, Baptism in the Holy Spirit is:

a concrete experience of the ‘Grace of Pentecost,’ in which the working of the Holy Spirit becomes an experienced reality in the life of the individual and of the faith community...the certain and sometimes overwhelming ‘realization’ of the loving nearness of God proclaimed in the Church’s message and encountered in the individual act of faith...a decisive introduction to a renewed perception and understanding of God’s presence and action in personal life and in the world. It is, in short, the experiential discovery, *in faith*, that Jesus is Lord by the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father.<sup>32</sup>

In receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, one knows subjectively that which is objectively true, that is, the overwhelming nearness and love of God for God’s people.

In describing the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Renewal does not claim a monopoly on experiencing “the deepened ‘realization’ of the personal relationship to Jesus Christ.”<sup>33</sup> Rather, this experience “does not belong to any particular movement, but to the Church, which celebrates the Sacraments of Initiation.”<sup>34</sup>

### The Fruits of “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”

Upon experiencing Baptism in the Holy Spirit, many speak of a new personal relationship with Jesus “as risen and present Lord and Savior through his Spirit.”<sup>35</sup> For many baptized Catholics who “have not had a genuine living encounter with the Lord,” in whom “there is still

---

<sup>30</sup> McGrath, “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal,” 33.

<sup>31</sup> Cordes, *Call to Holiness*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> McDonnell, *Toward a New Pentecost*, 1.

no ‘explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ’ (*Catechesi tradendae* 19), ‘baptism in the Spirit’ leads to a “renewal of baptismal grace in a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus.”<sup>36</sup>

Connected to this experiential encounter with God is “a renewed interest in prayer”<sup>37</sup> along with the “desire to read the Scriptures.”<sup>38</sup> According to Cordes, prayer is “at once personal and shared in community praise and intercession, which tries to be both contemplation and a source of evangelization.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, “Prayer is experienced as a well-spring of the spiritual life: prayer coming from the heart, transcending all sterility and merely routine prayer of praise.”<sup>40</sup>

A direct result of the rediscovery of prayer is “the formation and development in the Renewal of countless prayer groups throughout the world”<sup>41</sup> as well as a “deepened sense of the efficacy of the Sacraments for spiritual growth... One of the blessings of the Renewal has been this new appreciation for the beauty of the liturgy, of its sacred character and its evangelizing power.”<sup>42</sup> Many believers also attest to “the rediscovery of the Scriptures as the living Word of God.”<sup>43</sup> According to Cortes, “The texts take on a new clarity and vigor, they become relevant and nourishing for the heart and life of the believer.”<sup>44</sup>

Beyond inner spiritual renewal, Baptism in the Holy Spirit has led to transformation in interpersonal and community relationships. Many believers experience the Holy Spirit as “the power to serve and witness, to preach the gospel in word and deed with that manifestation of

---

<sup>36</sup> Cordes, *Call to Holiness*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

power which moves to faith and arouses faith.”<sup>45</sup> Many also experience “healing of interpersonal relationships and of damaged marriages.”<sup>46</sup>

### Interpretations of the Renewal

Reflection upon the development of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in 1967 has led many to interpret the Renewal as an answer to Pope John XXIII’s prayer at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council for a new Pentecost:

Renew Your wonders in this our day, as by a New Pentecost. Grant to You Church that, being of one mind and steadfast in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and following the lead of blessed Peter, it may advance the reign of our Divine Savior, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Amen.<sup>47</sup>

In his 1965 Christmas message, Pope Paul IV’s assertion that “the Church has felt as though the Spirit of Christ were flowing back within her” is regarded as prophetic, foreseeing the beginning of the Charismatic Renewal. In 1987, Pope John Paul II associates the Renewal with the “powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church during these years following the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>48</sup> According to John Paul II, the Charismatic Renewal is “an eloquent manifestation of this vitality today, a vigorous affirmation of what ‘the Spirit is saying to the Churches’ as we draw near to the end of the second millennium.”<sup>49</sup>

According to *Grace for the New Springtime*, a statement published in March 1997 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) Ad-Hoc Committee and approved by the NCCB Administrative Committee, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is:

one of the signs of hope our Holy Father is referring to as “present in the last part of this century” when he speaks of “a greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity” (Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 46). We believe that “the renewed outpouring of the

---

<sup>45</sup> McDonnell, *Toward a New Pentecost*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Mansfield, *As By A New Pentecost*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Cordes, *Call to Holiness*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Spirit of Pentecost in our times” (cf. *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, NCCB/USCC) is particularly present in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and in the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup>

In April 1998, John Paul II affirms, once again, the role of the Renewal as stemming out of the Second Vatican Council:

The Catholic charismatic movement is one of the many fruits of the Second Vatican Council, which, like a new Pentecost, led to an extraordinary flourishing in the Church’s life of groups and movements particularly sensitive to the action of the Spirit. How can we not give thanks for the precious spiritual fruits that the Renewal has produced in the life of the Church and in the lives of so many people? How many lay faithful—men, women, young people, adults and elderly—have been able to experience in their own lives the amazing power of the Spirit and his gifts! How many people have rediscovered faith, the joy of prayer, the power and beauty of the Word of God, translating all this into generous service in the Church’s mission! How many lives have been profoundly changed! For all this today, together with you, I wish to praise and thank the Holy Spirit.<sup>51</sup>

### Critiques of the Renewal

Several critiques have been raised regarding the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Among these critiques are accusations of fundamentalism and emotionalism.

#### Emotionalism

Closely related to the experiential dimension of realizing firsthand the deeply personal way in which God loves us, members of the Renewal have been accused of emotionalism and sentimentality. The response has been twofold. Cordes acknowledges the critique, and writes that “intensive emotional reactions and mystical or ecstatic experience...can degenerate into pure sentimentalism, emotionalism or even psychological aberration. Healthy thinking and proper discernment are helpful and necessary to compensate for this potential weakness.”<sup>52</sup> According to *Toward a New Pentecost*, “all emotional excesses, under the guise of a personal response to God, cheapen the faith of the believer and call into question his or her emotional balance.”<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB). *Grace for the New Springtime*. Mar. 1997. Ad-Hoc Committee for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. 7 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org/GraceEnglish.asp>>.

<sup>51</sup> Pope John Paul II, Audience of Pope John Paul II with the National Service Committee of the Italian “Renewal in the Spirit,” Rome, Italy, April 4, 1998. <<http://iccrs.org/index.php/ccr>>

<sup>52</sup> Cordes, *Call to Holiness*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> McDonnell, *Toward a New Pentecost*, 41.

On the other hand, these same emotional experiences, “even when they are expressed on the level of the physical (such as tears or laughter) can have a freeing and healing effect in the soul.”<sup>54</sup> One should not be quick to equate “a deeply personal expression of religious faith” with a purely emotional reaction.<sup>55</sup> There is a tendency in the West to relegate religious expressions to the intellect and will, and “thought improper to externalize religious feelings, even in moderation, in public.”<sup>56</sup> Religious experience and emotionalism are not the same. “Though distinct, the emotional element is not completely separate from experience. One experiences as a totality.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore,

The overintellectualization of worship forms has led to a certain sterility in theology, evangelization, and liturgical activity...seems to be based on a truncated view of the human person. It is not only the rational part of a human which is saved or called to worship...No part of personal existence is to be excluded from worship...The covenant bond quite properly elicits a total response involving the whole of a person as a thinking, willing, loving, fearing, hoping being.<sup>58</sup>

### Fundamentalism

With the rediscovery of Scriptures by those who become involved in the Renewal, many have been accused of fundamentalism, that is, “an approach to Scripture that is too literal and too immediate.”<sup>59</sup> The response, once again, has been twofold. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that members of the Renewal, while having a living faith in the power of God, are not always adequately aware of the created means God employs to mediate that power and do in fact sometimes take a too narrow approach”<sup>60</sup> Cordes writes, “It is especially important that the texts of the Bible not be read in isolation or be ascribed a ‘magical’ character. An isolation from other

---

<sup>54</sup> Cordes, *Call to Holiness*, 34.

<sup>55</sup> McDonnell, *Toward a New Pentecost*, 41.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Cordes, *Call to Holiness*, 21.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

texts, which are related to it, isolation from the living Tradition of the Church, or isolation from well-founded human knowledge which bears on the text, can lead to false understanding.”<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, leaders of the Renewal are quick to point out that the problem of fundamentalism is not specific to the movement, but is a problem of the general Catholic population.<sup>62</sup> The problem becomes apparent within those in the Renewal because members are reading the Bible on a regular basis.<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has given rise to spiritual renewal in the lives of many Catholics. Through continued reflection by those involved in the Renewal, especially in responding to critiques raised, further growth will surely follow. It remains to be seen what role the Catholic Charismatic Renewal will continue to play in the spiritual renewal of the Church. We hope for the day when “the whole Church is renewed charismatically and no longer needs a distinct movement.”<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> McDonnell, *Toward a New Pentecost*, 43.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ghezzi, “The End of the Catholic Pentecostal Movement,” quoted in Killian McDonnell, ed., *Toward a New Pentecost For a New Evangelization: Malines Document I, 2nd edition* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 5.

## Bibliography

- Bord, Richard J. and Joseph E. Faulkner. *The Catholic Charismatics: The Anatomy of a Modern Religious Movement*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983.
- Cordes, Paul Joseph. *Call to Holiness: Reflections on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997.
- International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS). "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal." Accessed November 7, 2010. <<http://iccrs.org/index.php/ccr>>.
- Mansfield, Patti Gallagher. *As By A New Pentecost: The Dramatic Beginning of The Catholic Charismatic Renewal*. Steubenville: Franciscan University Press, 1992.
- McDonnell, Killian, ed. *Toward a New Pentecost For a New Evangelization: Malines Document I, 2nd edition*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993.
- McGrath, Damien. "The Catholic charismatic renewal." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* no. 7 (June 1, 1974): 30-49. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 7, 2010).
- National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB). *Grace for the New Springtime*. Mar. 1997. Ad-Hoc Committee for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. 7 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org/GraceEnglish.asp>>.
- Zerr, Maurice. "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal." *African Ecclesial Review* 28, (October 1986): 293-305. *Catholic Periodical and Literature Index*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 7, 2010).