

THE FUTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

The Dawn of Charismatic Awakening in the Catholic Church

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The dawn of a charismatic awakening in the Catholic Church

Pope John XXIII, when he convened the Second Vatican Council, predicted a new Pentecost for the Church. His prayer at the beginning of the council was as follows: "*Divine Spirit, renew your wonders in our time as in a new Pentecost.*"

According to Pope John XXIII "*the council was not essentially a meeting between the bishops and the Pope, a horizontal encounter; it was first and foremost a meeting of the entire college of bishops with the Holy Spirit, a vertical meeting, the acceptance of an immense outpouring of the Holy Spirit for our time, a kind of new Pentecost*"¹

Probably a "Pentecostal Movement" among Catholics would never have arisen if the Pope and the bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council had not prayed and expected confidently from the Holy Spirit a new Pentecost and if they had not taken important decisions.

First they decided that the Catholic Church must participate fully and actively in the ecumenical movement begun with the historic Protestant Churches, especially following the scandal of division among Christians when the Christian Churches went to proclaim the Gospel in mission lands. Indeed, the division of the Christians put in question the holiest cause of the Church: the evangelization of the world.

This implied the recognition that "*we should not forget that anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can be a help to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the faith; indeed, it can always bring a deeper realization of the mystery of Christ and the Church.*"²

And considering the until then negative attitude towards what other churches would have to offer, this positive evaluation of the spiritual values that exist among Christians of other denominations was certainly a very important factor in accepting the idea that *Pentecostalism* could contribute to the spiritual renewal of the Catholic faithful.

The second decision of Vatican II that opened the way for acceptance of a Catholic Pentecostalism was the recognition of the relevance of the charismatic gifts in the Church. This recognition was highly opposed by some participants in the council, but the Cardinal *Leon Joseph Suenens*, archbishop of Malines-Brussels and Primate of the Catholic Church in Belgium, was able to keep the statement on gifts of the Holy Spirit in and to have it approved by an overwhelming majority.

¹ (Card. L.J. Suenens *Memorie e speranza*, E.P. Cap IV- Original title *Memories and Hope*, Veritas, Dublin, 1993, 400 pp.).

² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4.

This is what Cardinal Suenens said: “*The mention of the charisms in the provisional text of Lumen Gentium triggered the reaction of Cardinal Ruffini, who alone had authored a hundred interventions, and he demanded its withdrawal, claiming that the charisms were perhaps the prerogative of the primitive Church but that considering them still current could generate misunderstandings. In contrast my opinion was that one should speak of them and that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were an integral part of Christian life and of evangelization. The Council chose this perspective and the reflections on the charisms were integrated wisely and moderately in their tone but definitely positively. Later on, that text was used to rehabilitate the Charismatic Renewal: unintentionally then my speech was already looking to the future.*”³

A fundamental extract of the texts of the Council Vatican II is as follows: “*These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church.*”⁴

A few days after the speech on charisms, Cardinal Suenens met an Orthodox Bishop representative of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow at the council, who stated that this statement about the charisms “*was an important meeting point for rebuilding unity among the churches.*” The Cardinal believed also that a full appreciation of the function of the Holy Spirit in the Church was essential for any ecumenical dialogue. In the history of the Church, every Council is called “ecumenical” because it represents its universality and catholicity, but this time the word “ecumenical” under Pope John XXIII took on a meaning of total Christian universality because it included the participation as observers of representatives of the main Churches and Christian Communities. The presence of Pastor David Du Plessis (nicknamed Mr. Pentecost), a Pentecostal minister, who helped the birth and development of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church was particularly relevant.

The Pope and the Bishops who in 1964 had sought and approved the Declaration on the charisms could hardly imagine that only after three years, many Catholics had manifested gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophecy in that celebrated retreat of the first charismatic Catholics at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1967.

Indeed, without these two important decisions of the Council, it is doubtful that Roman Catholics would have been so open to a spiritual renewal, whose origins, growth and spread were to be found in the experience of Pentecostal and evangelical Protestant churches.

No wonder that in the proposals of the Council, beyond the ecumenical and charismatic movement, other spiritual contributions were brought about by the Holy Spirit in the Christian world outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church, especially in the Protestant Reformation, as well as in the Bible movement.

The Holy Spirit through the *ecumenical movement* and the *charismatic movement*, had made it clear to the whole Church that the two movements were in fact two branches of a single river, thus resulting from the same source, that flow along the same banks and opened up in the same sea.

Ecumenism and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are two aspects of one indivisible and sovereign action of the Holy Spirit. For what distinguishes them are the different aspects and areas in which the Spirit moves them.

³ Cap. V, II op. cit.

⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* 12.

Certainly, the acceptance of these gifts as well as the spreading of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are largely due to the intervention of Cardinal Suenens who was well known to be involved in ecumenical dialogue even before the Second Vatican Council.

One of the pains that Cardinal Suenens carried in his heart was the lack of importance of the laity in the Church: “*Our separated brothers accuse the Church of the sin of clericalism and of stifling the laity. Our separated brethren believe in the ‘priesthood of the faithful’ and assign them a fundamental role. It would be good to take this into account and develop an important fervent and paternal statement, toward the laity, in recognition of their rights and obligations by reason of the baptism that has made them part of the Church.*”⁵

In 1973 Cardinal Suenens was preparing a book entitled *L'Esprit Saint, notre espérance*, when he was informed of the birth of the “Catholic Pentecostal movement.” He gave up writing his book, especially since it spoke of the awakening of charisms ... which case he had pleaded during the Council. He thought it would be good to pay attention to what could be an action of the Holy Spirit, no matter how surprising. After the early contacts with the initiators of the Catholic Pentecostal Renewal in New York and Ann Arbor in the U.S., he said: “*We suddenly feel that the Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul take on life and assume relevance, and it seems that the truths of the past are recurring before our eyes. It is the discovery of the real action of the Holy Spirit, always acting according to the promise of Jesus. He has maintained and maintains the ‘word’. It is a new manifestation of the Spirit of Pentecost, a joy that the Church knew no more, because today the sky above the Church is cloudy. ‘Blessed are the people who know joy’, says the psalm.*”⁶

Among the initiatives that led to the acceptance of the Charismatic Renewal by the Catholic Church we must certainly consider the audience of Paul VI with the charismatic leaders in 1973 that took place after the international congress of Grottaferrata (Rome).

Thanks to the initiative of Cardinal Suenens a Theological and Pastoral Commission was formed who began the compilation of famous *Documents of Malines*, whose publication was meant to encourage, support and defend the harmonious development of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church.

The first document of Malines was prepared by an international workshop sponsored by Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens, under the guidance of most experienced theologians such as René Laurentin and Michael Hurley, S.J. and Cardinal Avery Dulles S.J., Yves Congar O.P., Walter Kasper, and Joseph Ratzinger, who from May 21st to 26th, 1974 assessed the situation of the Charismatic Renewal, which was experiencing a sudden and rapid expansion after the close of Vatican II.

The final text of the *Colloquium*, prepared by Father Kilian McDonnell, OSB and the other international team members who met at Malines, was signed by each of them: P. Carlos Aldunate s.j. (Chile), P. Salvador Carrillo, MSPS (Mexico), Ralph Martin (USA), SE Bishop Albert de Monleone O.P. (France), Fr. Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B. (USA), Fr. Heribert Mühlen (Germany), Veronica O'Brien (Ireland) and Kevin Ranaghan (United States). The theologian Fr. Paul Lebeau S.J. and Marie-Andre Houdart O.S.B. (Belgium), as secretaries and translators, were also part of the meeting.

The second Document of Malines⁷, signed only by the Archbishop of Malines-Bruxelles, intends to

⁵ Cap. IV op. cit.

⁶ Cap. VI, 8 op. cit.

⁷ L. J. SUENENS, *Ecumenism and Charismatic Renewal: Theological and Pastoral Orientations*, Ann Arbor Mich., Servant Books, 1978. Previously card. Suenens had published the French edition entitled: *Oecumenisme et renouveau charismatique*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1978. We quote the English edition.

examine the relationship between *ecumenism* and the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic prospective, a topic that he had already dealt with in various written and spoken interventions, but which is looked at here from a global perspective.

At Pentecost in 1979 Cardinal Suenens published a third Malines Document, dedicated to the social implications of the Renewal and the Christian life⁸. The text responds to the criticisms often addressed to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. These criticisms came from those Christians mainly engaged in social action and some areas of Liberation Theology, in Latin America. They feared that the Charismatic Renewal would lead Christians to abandon their responsibilities before the problems of humanity. The text was drafted in collaboration with the Brazilian Bishop *Dom Helder Câmara* of Recife (Pe), a man very sensitive to the particular social situations of his country of origin.

The fourth Document of Malines concerns the sensitive issue of “*the Renewal and the powers of darkness*.” Speaking about the charism of healing, Cardinal Suenens also touches upon the very delicate issue of the prayer of “liberation” and exorcism, that he considered so important that it required a thorough discussion.

In offering an answer to the theological and pastoral questions most frequently asked to the Renewal at the time, Cardinal Suenens gave to the Charismatic Movement a unique opportunity to better express the wealth it brought about.

On Monday of Pentecost 1975, during the Holy Year, Pope Paul VI received in the Basilica of St. Peter the International Congress of the Charismatic Renewal. Over ten thousand charismatics worshiped in the Spirit and the Pope prophetically called the Catholic Charismatic Renewal “a chance for the Church and the world.”⁹ From this moment on, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal had citizenship in the Church of Rome.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal spread widely thanks to the initiative of a charismatic prayer group called “*Lumen Christi*”, at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome under the care of two influential professors and theologians, Jesuit *Father Francis Sullivan* and the famous biblical scholar *Father Carlo Maria Martini*, later Archbishop and Cardinal of Milan.

Many foreign ecclesiastics who attended the Pontifical Universities in Rome received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and welcomed the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Several of them were appointed bishops and spread almost simultaneously the experience in their churches of origin at a global level.

At the Vatican, in the Paul VI Hall, two *World Retreats for Priests* belonging to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (1984 and 1990) were celebrated, promoted by *Father Tom Forest*, C.Ss.R. with about 7,000 participants at the events and in the presence of *Pope John Paul II*, *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*, *Cardinal Leon Joseph Suenens* and hundreds of bishops and cardinals from around the world. It was also attended by delegates from other Churches and Christian communities.

It is worth mentioning the ministry of the Word of *Father Raniero Cantalamessa O.F.M. Cap.*, a Capuchin Franciscan priest, preacher to the papal household, who lived the experience of baptism

⁸ The original document is called: *Renouveau dans l'Esprit et service de l'homme* (Lumen Vitae, Bruxelles 1979), in the English speaking countries: *Charismatic Renewal and Social Action: A Dialogue* (Published by the Fiat Association) and it has been translated in Italian under the title: *Rinnovamento nello Spirito e servizio all'uomo*, Ed. Paoline, 1979.

⁹ Pope Paul VI, May 19, 1975, Cfr. French text in: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, Città del Vaticano, vol. XIII [1975], 536-542

in the Spirit and met the Charismatic Renewal at the Ecumenical Conference in Kansas City in 1977. He is contributing decisively and effectively to support the Catholic Charismatic Renewal at the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises he preaches to the Pope and cardinals of the Curia in the Vatican, and in the many texts he published on the Charismatic Renewal, both in his international preaching and in his contacts with other churches and Christian denominations, as well as through his programs on Italian television.

The publication of the text “*Fanning the flame*” prepared by the Commission of theologians and pastoral workers “*The Heart of the Church*” in 1990 in Techny, Illinois (USA), with the support of an “ad hoc” Commission of Bishops for the Charismatic Renewal of the United States of America was of great help to the theological and pastoral reflection of the Charismatic Renewal. The work of “*The Heart of the Church*” helped to spread the study of Father Kilian McDonnell OSB and Father George T. Montague on *Christian initiation and Baptism in the Spirit: Testimony of the Fathers of the Church in the first eight centuries*.¹⁰ Recently, this text has served as a basis for further dialogue between the Vatican and some classical Pentecostal churches sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.¹¹

An important choice for the promotion of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was to create two international coordinating bodies that were recognized by the Holy See: The *Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships* (CFCCCF) in 1990 and the *International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services* in 1993 (ICCRS), with sees in Vatican City.

These organizations regularly organize various international meetings, for bishops, priests and Catholic charismatic leaders.

Special mention must be made of the two theological colloquia held in Rome: The *Colloquium* of 2001, on “*Prayer of Healing in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*,” which followed the “*Instruction on prayers for healing from God*” of the Vatican¹² and the *Colloquium* on “*Charisms in the Charismatic Renewal of the Catholic Church*” in 2008, organized in collaboration with the *Pontifical Council for the Laity*.

The *Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships* (CFCCCF) organizes the annual International and Continental Conferences. Since 2006 they organize *international meetings for Bishops interested in the new communities of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*. The approximately 80 bishops from more than 40 nations attending the 3rd International Meeting held in Assisi (Italy) in October of 2008, were received together with over 1,000 leaders of the Catholic Fraternity in a special audience by Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican on October 31. It was the first public and official meeting of Pope Joseph Ratzinger with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

During the special audience he expressed the importance and the relevance of the charisms of the Holy Spirit in the Church today. One of the most important parts of his talk says:

“What we learn in the New Testament on charism, which appeared as visible signs of the coming of the Holy Spirit, is not a historical event of the past, but a reality ever alive. It is the same divine Spirit, soul of the Church, that acts in every age and those mysterious and effective interventions of the Spirit are manifest in our time in a providential way... We can, therefore, rightly say that one of the positive elements and aspects of the Community of the Catholic

¹⁰ *Christian initiation and baptism in the Holy Spirit, Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, The Liturgical Press, Collegville, Minnesota, A Michael Glazier Book, 1991, in Italian Edizioni Dehoniane, Rome 1993.

¹¹ On Becoming a Christian: Insights from Scripture and the Patristic writings with some contemporary reflections. Report of the Fifth Phase of the International Dialogue between some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders and the Catholic Church (1998-2006).

¹² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction about prayers for healing from God*, Vatican City, September 14, 2000.

Charismatic Renewal is precisely their emphasis on the charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit and their merit lies in having recalled their topicality in the Church.”¹³

Pope Benedict XVI during the Solemnity of Pentecost in 2008, addressing the pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square, urged Catholics to rediscover the baptism in the Holy Spirit and said, “*We read in the Acts of the Apostles that the disciples were gathered in prayer in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit descended upon them with power, like wind and fire. They, then, began to preach in many languages the good news of Christ's resurrection.*” This was the “*baptism in the Holy Spirit*”, already heralded by John the Baptist: “*I baptize you with water – he said to the crowds - but he who comes after me is mightier than me ... He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and Fire*” (Mat 3:11). The whole mission of Jesus, Benedict XVI acknowledged, was in fact aimed “*to give men the Spirit of God and baptize them in his 'bath' of regeneration.*” On this occasion Pope Benedict XVI wished to extend this invitation to all: “*rediscover, dear brothers and sisters, the beauty of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.*”¹⁴

The Charismatic Renewal in the present time

Speaking, in concrete terms, of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the present time is only an attempt to say what message it has to send to the world and to Christians.

What is at stake here is the phenomenon itself, taken as a whole, and not just this or that practice such as speaking in tongues or healings, etc. ... or its organization and structures.

I consider the Charismatic Renewal to be the extraordinary *event* of the Spirit that is intended to characterize the future of the entire Catholic Church, the event which was prophetically described by Pope Paul VI on May 19, 1975, as “*an opportunity for the Church and the world!*”¹⁵

This movement, so little studied by specialists, is the fastest growing Catholic missionary movement in the world. It has grown in less than 50 years from zero to over hundred and fifty million Roman Catholics. This is the greatest movement of revival and renewal in the history of the Roman Catholic Church¹⁶. There has never been in the entire history of the Catholic Church an event similar to this charismatic/pentecostal awakening.

Faced with a movement of more than hundred and fifty million people—who in the overwhelming majority experienced a genuine experience of Christian life and a sincere desire for the mission—it is hard to deny the presence—however mysterious—of the Spirit of God, which operates also outside the visible Church, which is what the Catholic Magisterium speaks of.

The Renewal has been in some ways a “*spiritual shock*” for the Catholic Church; no one could have foreseen it or scheduled an injection of spirituality in the late twentieth century, a current of spirituality that would have invested millions and millions of men and women who are now hungry for and in search of God.

¹³ Benedict XVI, Special audience with the *Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships* in the Hall of the Benedictions at the Apostolic Palace of the Vatican, Friday, October 31, 2008 at 12:15 PM.

¹⁴ VATICAN CITY, Sunday May 11, 2008

¹⁵ Cfr. French text in: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, Vatican City, vol. XIII [1975], 536-542

¹⁶ Cfr. Massimo Introvigne, *La Sfida Pentecostale*, LDC Turin 1996 and *Aspettando la Pentecoste*, il Quarto Ecumenismo, Interviews with Matteo Calisi and Giovanni Traettino, Edizioni Messaggero, Padua 1996.

We must get to a deeper understanding of “*what God does*” in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, what message does it bear for the Catholic Church and for all Christians who are in the world in order to understand and be part of the mission which the Lord entrusts to His Church.

How does God work in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal?

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal reintroduces the *Primacy of God* in the life of the Church and of the faithful.

The spirituality of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has its roots in the Pentecost as described by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, where the Holy Spirit erupted into the life of the early Church and generated three fruits: *Presence - Power-Praise!* (see Acts 2:1 ff.).

First of all, the living presence of Jesus proclaimed as Lord (see Acts 2:36 and 1 Corinthians 12:3). Jesus speaking of the action of the Spirit in St. John says: “He will testify to me” (Jn 15:26), then the power of evangelization accompanied by the charisms and a fervent prayer of praise (cf. Acts 29.31).

Thus, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal proposes to the Christians to be open to an eruption of the Presence of God in our day when praying for a renewed “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” (cf. Acts 1:5).¹⁷ It is precisely this “baptism in the Holy Spirit” that marks the fundamental subject of the primacy of God.

Jesus said: first, “Receive the Holy Spirit” and then “be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8) ... because “without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). One cannot, in fact, build the Church without the Lord: charisms, gifts, and ministries come from God, come from the Spirit! (cf. 1 Cor 12, 4-11). Because if the Lord does not build the house, its builders labor in vain! (Ps 127.1). That is why Paul says that “we are baptized in the Spirit into one body” (1 Cor 12:13) the Body of Christ, the Church.

Such irruption of the Presence of God leads the people to a strong desire for God, to an insatiable desire for God. People hunger for spiritual things, hunger for prayer, for the Word of God, for the gifts of the Spirit. They are hungry with an insatiable hunger!

Thus, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal presents itself as a contemporary movement of “search for God”, as occurred in the past with the great reform movements of the Church—like the mendicant orders in the Middle Ages, the movement of Francis of Assisi and still other—where people were never quite satisfied in their hunger for God.

And so the Catholic Charismatic Renewal becomes an “anxious” search for the presence of God; as St. Francis used to say: “Never enough of God!”

The boldness of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is in proclaiming that man can experience God, because Scripture says that it is right to experience God, but more importantly, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal states that it is “God who wants to experience us” (cf. Jn 4:23) to the point that he established his dwelling in us; he builds us up as a temple of His Spirit, the place of His

¹⁷ cfr. Kilian McDonnell, George T. Montague, *Iniziazione cristiana e Battesimo nello Spirito Santo*, testimonianza dei primi otto secoli, Edizioni Dehoniane Rome, 1993 and *Ravvivare la fiamma dello Spirito*, Che relazione esiste tra il Battesimo nello Spirito Santo e l'iniziazione cristiana? RnS Rome 1992; Giuseppe Bentivegna S.J., *Il Battesimo nello Spirito Santo*, Testimonianze dalla Chiesa dei Padri, Coop. RnS Rome 1995 and *Effusione dello Spirito Santo e doni carismatici*, La testimonianza di Sant'Agostino, Coop. RnS Rome 1995.

Most Holy Presence, and, as the Apostle Paul says, he makes our “body, into the living temple of the Holy Spirit ... Holy Temple of God” (cf. 1 Cor 3,16,17). This is an amazing reality!

Then we understand well how logical and natural it is that the irruption of God's presence generates portentous acts such as charisms, manifestations, gifts of the Spirit, because God has found access to us and we can become channels of the “Gift of God” (cf. 1 Cor 12.7, Jn 4:10).

In summary, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is this irruption of the supernatural in a society that has announced the death of God and in a Church threatened by secularization.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal as “challenge of the Spirit”

What does the Lord want to tell us through the event of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal?

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a kind of “challenge” of the Spirit against a secular vision of a closed world, folded in on itself and without God, who has stopped seeking God and turned to the worship of the false gods of the religion of hedonism: money, sex, power.

In substance, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, “challenges” any society that reduces man to this earthly life in alienation from God, but this “challenge” is not with words but with life. Indeed, through its manifestations it publicly proclaims that God is alive, that He comes to us in Christ and that in this personal encounter with Him He brings man to fulfillment. Moreover, it states that the universe is not closed and that humanity is walking towards its fulfillment, calling aloud the glorious return of the Bridegroom “Maranà tha, come O Lord!” (1 Cor 16:22, cf. Revelation 22:20)

The “challenge” then takes place in the attention that God loves men and calls them to salvation, because “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn 3:16). The “challenge” consists in the testimony of personal experiences in a world where, due to the inflation of languages, the man of today is no longer prepared to listen to sermons.

Pope Paul VI said that “*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, ... or if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses.*”¹⁸ The charismatic Catholics have not sought a new language of faith and not even attempted to make speeches about God, but they opened the Bible, they accepted the word of God with simplicity, and sometimes even oversimplifying, they tried by every human effort to live it.

They have turned to God in a direct and friendly way, speaking familiarly to the Father with humility in prayers and songs and they stated that they had a personal relationship with Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Even their daily conversation was punctuated with simple expressions like “Amen,” “Hallelujah” or “Glory to God”, perhaps distributing words of blessing to anyone they would meet, like, “God bless you brother” or “Peace to you sister” not without surprising and disarming, or even annoying their interlocutors.

The attitude of the Renewal can be interpreted as follows: as you cannot speak to the world “*about God*” as it does not want to hear it, is it not better to speak directly “*to God*” in prayer and publicly manifest that He is living in his Church and that His Church is alive?

¹⁸ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975.

Faced with the difficulty of speaking about God the Catholic Charismatic Renewal does not argue, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal testifies, shares its spiritual experience, its conversion with spontaneity and simplicity. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal presents a challenge to a society that tends to “*remain silent about God!*” The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a living prophecy!

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal “challenges” not through reasoning and wisdom of words, but by praying, participating in sacramental celebrations and witnessing through the joy of believing the great truth—against every lie of the enemy who has reduced the human existence in our century to slavery—that faith alone gives meaning to human life and joy for living for God.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is conversion and sanctification

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal focuses on conversion (*metànoia*) and renewal of the heart. The *Baptism in the Spirit* is nothing more than the call to live in holiness.

With this new mission of the Holy Spirit¹⁹ millions of Catholics in the world today are fired up by a great spiritual awakening. A multitude of Catholics have taken the decision to radically live the Christian faith and to embark upon a journey of perfection.

The testimonies which occupy an important part in assemblies and conferences of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are a constant appeal to conversion and holiness: “The Kingdom of God is upon us, we must change, welcome it and change our life” (cf. Mt 3 , 2).

The Spirit is holy and demands our holiness and repentance from our sin. Naturally, the author of conversion and sanctification is always the Spirit. All this has helped create a new culture of the Spirit in the Church.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is “renewal in the *Holy Spirit*” (Titus 3:5), but we know how narrow is the space that is often reserved for it. Sometimes in some areas of the Church *He* is not allowed to act as *He* would.

Terms such as “believe in the Spirit,” “surrendering to the Spirit,” “become available to the Spirit” or “let the Spirit work in us” are familiar to the Charismatics.

But unfortunately the mentality of the world—who does not understand the dimensions of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:14)—has even made a breach in some areas of the Christian community, who now seem hostile to “be guided by the Spirit” and that are not “listening to the Spirit.” Because of this hostility, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal was even unjustly marginalized, attacked or caricatured for its way of being “in the Spirit”, often accused of “quietism” and of “fideism” especially by those who in the Church are dealing with social justice or are supporters of a certain theology of liberation.²⁰

At a time like the present one, where membership in the Church exists mostly voluntary and is characterized by militancy, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal puts the accent on God’s initiative and on His work of salvation. Indeed, St Paul says, “we are not justified by our works” (cf. Rom

¹⁹ cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I,q.43, a.6, ad 2um in Francis A. Sullivan sj, *Carismi e Rinnovamento Carismatico*, Editrice Ancora 1983 Milan, pp. 76-82.

²⁰ cf. Paulo Lima, *Chi ha paura della libertà?*, interview with Joseph Comblin in JESUS, December 1998 pp. 14-17. To expose the myth about the social commitment demonstrated by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, especially in Latin America, please see Card. Léon J. Suenens and Dom Helder Câmara in *Rinnovamento nello Spirito e servizio all'uomo*, Documento Colloquio di Malines n. 3, Edizioni Paoline Roma, Jesus Revolution series n. 17.

3:27-28), but by the Lord himself who is accepted by us in faith. This expression of Paul (even before Luther) is a biblical truth, and therefore Catholic. Man is not baptized by himself, but he is baptized by another who acts on behalf of Christ through the power of his Spirit.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal remembers that everything comes from God and that faith welcomes God and His Word, and that only faith in God can produce benefits in corporal and social works. Without true conversion I doubt we will have a genuine Christian volunteerism in the Church.

I do not think there is a threat of “quietism” in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal because believing in the Spirit actually means death to oneself.

For example:

- this death already occurs when an ordinary Catholic, who has never prayed in public, dares a spontaneous prayer aloud in front of others;
- witnesses about his spiritual experience and takes an attitude of prayer with song and gestures of the body;
- accepts the prayers of others for *himself* and on *himself* in a way that highlights the reality of prayer accompanied by the laying on of hands (cf. Mk 16:18).

Those who enter the Catholic Charismatic Renewal gladly say that these gestures have unblocked blockages and have led them to an inner liberation through death to self.

It is an incredible miracle of the Spirit to witness the rebirth of the faithful in the Catholic Church who before their conversion had led a life similar to death and then, by virtue of the rediscovery of the Son of God, take individual and collective responsibilities for improving their personal, family and social life, and that of their communities.

The quiet ones become eloquent preachers of the Word of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, the “ignorant” reveal forms of knowledge that are truly astonishing. It is really Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:11 ff.), a new Pentecost!

"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." (1 Cor 1,27-29).

This type of spontaneous charismatic experience is often the only manifestation of religion for the most marginalized in society who have no access to ministries set up by the recognized ecclesiastical structure.

The poor, the marginalized and uneducated, who are often deprived of any dignity or social role in the world and sometimes even in our churches, now assume a dignified position as de facto leaders of ministries or assume pastoral responsibilities, especially women!

Those who did not seem to have the qualities to be guides in the Christian community, have now been cured of the ignorance imposed at times by academic and theological culture and they have been freed from their enslavement to the excesses of clericalism, a monocentric model where the

Bishop or the pastor takes the initiative and command and, in the periphery, the community is receptive and obedient.

For this we can say that the Charismatic Renewal has been an exceptional moment of grace, in which those who were considered non entities by society and lacking any kind of theological or ecclesiastical mission, launched the movement which has experienced the fastest development in the entire history of the Catholic Church!

All of this is the result of the primacy of the Presence of God in the irruption of Pentecost!

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the New Evangelization

Another fruit of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is the power of evangelization.

The characteristic of the evangelization carried out by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, inserted into a pagan society like ours, cannot be dissimilar from the characteristics of the early Church.

Even today we see that the Spirit works the same things we read in the pages of Scripture. He has lost none of his power, none of his gifts: *He* is God Almighty. The evangelization undertaken by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is accompanied by the gifts of the Spirit as described in the Acts of the Apostles and in St. Mark's Gospel in chapter 16:17-20.

It is the Lord who has awakened and continues to awake in the Catholic Church, the reality of the charisms so that the new evangelization, new in its ardor, its methods, in its expression, may be new mostly in the new power and signs that accompany it. The New Testament is the fundamental model of the evangelization of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

The Christian Church, fruit of Pentecost, was born not only by preaching the Word, who produced 3000 conversions and baptisms (Acts 2:41), but also by the ministry of healing which caused 5000 conversions!

The Holy Spirit today needs to convert sinners, not only through preaching but also through the *signs* accompanying the preaching of the gospel promised by Jesus and that He himself performed! (see Mark 16:20).

The Apostle Paul, too, recalls that "*his Gospel did not spread among the brothers of the community only through the Word,*" but also "*with the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 15 .18 to 19, and cf. 1 Thes 1:5; Heb 2:4). *Signs, miracles, wonders and healings* are the strongest and most powerful testimony given by the Holy Spirit to the Word of the Gospel and for the conversion of unbelievers (cf. Mk 16:17-20).

If the charisms were much needed in the early Church to convert the "*good pagans*" they are now even more necessary to convert the "*bad Christians*" who are only Christian by name!

Through the teaching of the early Church, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has learned to appreciate the use of *charisms* to evangelize. The Church today has the same power to preach, heal and cast out demons that belonged to Jesus and the Church of the New Testament.

The Church today is the continuity of the saving power of Jesus in History, because "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and always!*" (Heb 13:8) and even the Church is the same as Jesus promised

His abiding presence: "*Here I am with you until the end of the world*" (Mt 28:20). "*Heaven and earth will pass away but my words shall not pass away*" (Mt 24:35).

Especially today, preaching the message of salvation without continuing the same works of Jesus would betray the mission that God has entrusted to the Church. A doctrine of divine salvation that is abstract, theoretical, intellectual or moralizing, is empty rhetoric, because it basically does not produce conversions and does not give salvation.

Jesus said, "*Preach, heal and cast out*" (cf. Mt 10,7-8), the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is aware that if we only preach in the Church, we do not do the will of Jesus!

The mission of Jesus and the Church is not yet complete but needs to continue through contemporary apostles who preach and do the same acts of power performed by Jesus and the Apostles, in fact that perform "*things even greater than what He has done*" since going to the Father, He has entrusted to the Church to continue his ministry (cf. Jn 14:12).

On this line the official teaching of the Church at the Second Vatican Council has encouraged the use of charisms to evangelize as revealed by the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church: the charisms "*are useful for the renewal and building up of the Church.*"²¹

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal knows it is really important to follow the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church and feel *Cum Ecclesiae*, which is why it has undertaken the task of pursuing its mission of evangelization in the Church, taking the daring use of charisms in the proclamation of the Word of God.

Church doctrine and the experience of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in its more than 40 years of life, reveal to us a valuable lesson, that is if the charismatic Catholics will not exercise the gifts and charisms of the Spirit, they will die, as has happened in past centuries. So the Word of God comes to our aid, encouraging us to desire the charisms honestly and in humility for the edification of the Church (1 Cor 12,4-11; 14:1, Eph 4:11; Rom 12,6-9) and remove any obstacle that limits their use. St. Paul says: "*Brothers regarding the gifts of the Spirit I do not want you to be ignorant*" (1 Cor 12:1).

We have waited centuries in the Church to see the reappearance of the gifts of the Spirit in the Catholic Church and a Charismatic Renewal thanks to Vatican II. The charismatic Catholics want to be the witnesses that God has chosen, and whom he entrusted with the specific mandate to evangelize with power.

At this point it seems appropriate to define clearly the importance of "healing ministry" in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Our prayer is also, according to one of our way of saying, "a prayer of deliverance or of healing" and is associated with spiritual and even physical benefits (cf. Mk 16:18; 1 Cor 12:9; Jas 5:14).

We ask those who have been freed and healed to testify because Christians are signs that the Kingdom of God has come close to humanity (see Lk 10:9; Mt 11:4). In the ministry of healing there is the expression of faith that indicates that salvation and healing are for the whole person. Christ came not only to save souls, but to men in their entirety.

²¹ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* cap. 12/ b).

The imposition of hands and anointing with oil are the means by which the Church expresses this faith. As testified by the Gospels, Jesus comes as the great Healer who heals both the souls sickened by sin and the physical illness. He is the Redeemer of man. His touch brings *shalom* (Jn 20:21), peace, restoring the unity of spirit, soul and body. In this way the brothers and sisters in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal attest that they have been touched by Jesus and made whole.

In this ministry, there is a valuable lesson in advanced pedagogy: the touch of the divine on the flesh of man reveals the good news that even the weakest are worthy of becoming the tabernacles of the glory of God. The outcasts become recipients of honor by whom God makes known the mysteries of the Kingdom. It is not uncommon in our communities to find mentally or physically disabled people who are used by God to bring healing to others. Their hands become the hands of God and their touch reveals the power of God. Really this is a mystery!

Often it is the ministry of healing that creates most apprehension within the Catholic Church. It was evidenced at the publication of "*Instruction on prayers for healing from God*" decided and issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican City, September 14, 2000. The correspondence body-spirit, rediscovered in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal makes the charismatic prayers appear "uncontrolled" and "too emotional" to those whose life seems to be "under control" and whose approach to God is primarily cognitive.²²

However, it is this correspondence body-spirit that attracts those who know they do not have everything "under control", and have nothing to lose. These are people who accept with open arms the embrace of God because God is a reality, not a shred of theory: He is a living person and when these people make a personal experience of Him, they say that a great change occurred in their lives, "the God of Heaven" came to live in them and they report that they are no longer the same.

The message of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, therefore, is a stumbling block to some and a message of liberation for others. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is the voice of the voiceless and reduces the eloquent and articulate speech of the wise to stutter. How embarrassing this all is, and yet how subversively powerful is the Lord: "*I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will*" (Mt 11:25-26).

One can say that wherever the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is flourishing, there are people who find freedom from the powers of darkness and who are experiencing healing in body and spirit. This type of healing prayer reintroduces the religious dimension in the secular society.

In support of this ministry of healing of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal the Vatican has published two documents:

The first is a report written by four departments in the Vatican, which states: "*Special attention should be paid to the dimension of experience which is the discovery of the person of Christ through prayer and a committed life (for example, the charismatic movements and the 'born-again' movements)... Special attention should also be given to the ministry of healing through prayer.*"²³

The second document is a letter from the Vatican Secretariat of State on behalf of His Holiness John Paul II to participants at the International Seminar on the *healing ministry* organized by the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS) in San Giovanni Rotondo (Foggia)

²² cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical Letter on the relationship between faith and reason, 14 September 1998, Editions Paoline, Collana Magisterium n. 279, Milan 1998.

²³ *Il fenomeno delle sette o nuovi movimenti religiosi, Sfida pastorale*. Edizioni Dheoniane Bologna 1986, chap. 3.3.

in October 1995: "... His Holiness is confident that the Seminar will contribute to value increasing the charismatic gifts of healing in their essential aspect in relation to faith in Christ and to building His Church in unity and love."²⁴

The official teaching of the Magisterium in the New Catechism of the Catholic Church is along the same lines: "*The Holy Spirit gives to some a special charism of healing (cf. 1 Cor 12,9.28.30) to show the power of the grace of the Risen One. 'Heal the sick' (Mt 10:8). The Church has received this task from the Lord and tries to implement it through the care that is given to the sick through prayer of intercession by which it accompanies them. It believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, healer of souls and bodies.*"²⁵

This is the official doctrine of the Magisterium of the Church to which the Catholic Charismatic Renewal owes allegiance and obedience.

The Recovery of Praise and Worship in Catholic Charismatic Renewal

The third fruit of Catholic Charismatic Renewal is praise and adoration.

As previously stated, the work of the Spirit of Renewal is not confined to the recovery of evangelization. Indeed, accordingly the awakened, sanctified People renewed in unity, are driven towards becoming the People of Praise and Adoration, for renewed Worship in God through the Spirit.

The Pentecostal becoming of the Presence and Power of God, triggers the power of praise and doxological adoration in the Renewal, just as the Church wisely leads the faithful to enunciate in the liturgical hymn of the Glory: "We praise You for Your great glory". In Catholic Charismatic Renewal the praise is sung and celebrated in continuity with the entire Biblical and Liturgical Tradition of the Catholic Church.

St. Augustine says that "those who sing well pray twice" and "a Church that sings is a Church that loves "!

The encounter with God is always an extraordinary event, it cannot be simply recited with prayer formulas! Paul says there is a prayer done with "intelligence", but also with the "spirit" (1 Cor 14:15). Indeed, words seek the meaning, but the way in which the "spirit" is closest to God is to sing *with jubilation*.

The comment of St. Augustine to this regard is the following: "“What does it mean to sing in jubilation? It means to realize that you cannot express in words what our heart are singing. People who are singing, whilst they reap, they harvest, whilst they are zealously busy in other activities, who have begun to exult with joy in the words of a song, as if filled with such great joy that they can no longer express it in words, leave off the syllables of words and go into the sound of *jubilation*. For *jubilation* is a sound which signifies that the heart is giving utterance to what it cannot say in words. And for who is such *jubilation* fitting if not for the ineffable God? For he is ineffable whom one cannot express in words; and if you cannot express Him in words, and yet you cannot remain silent either, then what is left but to sing in *jubilation*, so that your heart may rejoice without

²⁴ G.B. Re, Substitute, Secretariat of State, First Section – General Affairs, prot. n. 377.810, Vatican City, September 28, 1995.

²⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) n. 1508.

words, and your unbounded joy may not be confined by the limits of syllables. *Do sing to Him with jubilation.*²⁶

In the realm of the adoration, Catholic Charismatic Renewal has had the merit to transmit into Church prayer the ancient practice of "*singing in the Spirit*" of the first Christian communities (1 Cor 14,15).

Now we know that the Church is par excellence the living temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:22). And the Holy Spirit is in the Church to offer "Service" in the Temple, and the service in the Temple is the liturgy, praise and adoration of God (cf. 1 Pt 2:5).

Thus, there is a worshipping aspect of *Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, which is the purpose of the entire Church, in her progress to the Presence and in the Glory of God! It's logical that the people that have "awakened in the Spirit", through a dynamic faith are thus transformed into a people of worshippers who sing the praises of the Lord, the Redeemer. Catholic Charismatic Renewal is thus to be understood as a charismatic (cf. 1 Cor 14:26) and prophetic adoration movement.

This aspect of praise, adoration, prayer and chant, highlights Church worship renewal by the Spirit, renewing the People of God as the temple of the Holy Spirit, renewing the common and universal holy priesthood of the baptized (cf. 1 Pt 2:5) and renewing the sacrifices of praise in the Church (cf. Heb 13:15).

Through the way of *Spiritual worship* (cf. Rm 12:1) passes the power of God that transforms and regenerates the community of Christians and shows to the world the beauty and splendor of the Church, Christ's adorned Bride (Acts 21:2).

In charismatic prayer also the body plays a crucial role, since it is the living temple of the Spirit (1 Cor 6:10) and as Paul says, we can present our "bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your *reasonable service*" (Rm 12:1). When we enter in a relationship with God in the encounter of prayer, also our bodies enter in a relationship with Him. The body is receptive and stands in awe of the Lord. This is why through prayer also the body receives relief and solace.

When, for example, our hands are raised in adoration and praise they are conveying the passionate yearning for descent in God's glory (*Shekina*), the manifestation of the Power from the Highness, like the cloud over the Temple of Salomon (2 Chro 5:13) or like the Pentecost in Jerusalem in the Acts (Acts 2,1). These are the hands that wish to extend in the faith to touch Jesus and be bestowed with healing and comfort from his Spirit (cf. Lk 8:43-44).

When our bodies sway in the elation of the Spirit, dancing and singing, they are yearning for a healing that is deeper than physical healing, since it is the healing of the soul. Through Catholic Charismatic Renewal the Lord is restoring also the gift of the sacred dance to His Church. Many experiences signal this recovery.

Catholic Charismatic renewal prayer assemblies, the typical expression of Church countenance – the Bride of Christ – are concrete faith practices, an adhesion to God and the renunciation of idols. In prayer the Renewal announces that man is only free when he says *yes* to the Lord. This interior assent is visible in the joy of being together, of praising the Lord, living within the Baptism

²⁶ *Ennarrationes in Psalmos*, 32, II, sermo 1:8. CCL 38, p. 254. Works of St. Augustine. *Esposizione sui salmi*, 32, II, n.8, Città Nuova, Rome, 1982, vol. 1, p. 573. For other works of St. Augustine on the same theme see CCL 38, pp. 161 ss., p. 533; CCL 39, p. 839, pp. 1229 ss., p. 1332, p. 1374, pp. 1394 ss.; CCL 40, p. 1458.

of the Spirit of Jesus thus rejecting the mundane spirit, saying ‘no’ to sin and to the allurements of Satan!

*The future of Catholic Charismatic Renewal:
The recovery of Christian unity*

A new commitment that the Lord once more entrusts to Catholic Charismatic Renewal is the recovery of Christian unity, in adherence to the will and prayer of Jesus before leaving this world: "*that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me*" (John 17:21).

I discovered that Christians' divide lies at the fountainhead of conflicts and divisions between nations, as is the case of Northern Ireland and across Europe. World nations no longer ascribe honor and glory to the God of the Nations! One of the reasons for this fundamental sin lies in the fact that Christians are disunited. God is no longer glorified by the nations because of Church divisions. Sin engulfs the nations because Christians don't bear witness to mutual love. The world will never believe Gospel Proclamation until we are divided.

The Lord wants the unity of nations to be realized through Christian unity. For the nations there is no economic, geographic or political unity, nor can unity be accomplished by organizations like the UN, the European Union or other similar organizations. These are but illusions! The only true possibility for unity among the nations has one only model, that of the Pentecost: this is the work of God, it is what God accomplishes. Divisions inside the Church constitute an evident contradiction with the Spirit of the Pentecost.

According to the Revelation, the project of the Spirit, through the event of the Pentecost, is that the God of the Jews become the God of the Nations. Indeed, St. Luke narrates that upon the Effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost there were "*Men of Parthia, Media, and Elam, and those living in Mesopotamia, in Judaea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and those who have come from Rome, Jews by birth and others who have become Jews, Men of Crete and Arabia, to all of us they are talking in our different languages, of the great works of God*" (Act 2:9-11).

The Pentecost is the Revelation of the Lord of the Nations on earth. God is acknowledged by the nations on earth as the Lord Saviour of the nations: "And it shall come to pass that *whoever calls on the name* of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). In the Pentecost the Lord calls upon the peoples of world nations to glorify Him, speaking in the language of the Apostles (cf. Act 2:3 and 7) symbolically manifests God's will to be praised by the whole world. Many psalms reveal the desire of God to be praised by all world populations: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" (Psalm 117:1).

Starting from the spirituality of Pentecost, Catholic Charismatic Renewal seems to recover the topical relevance of healing divisions between Christians. Why?

Because the *Baptism in the Spirit* represents the gift of Christian unity par excellence: "For by one *Spirit* we were all *baptized* into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). The *Baptism in the Spirit* is the gift par excellence of the reunited and undivided Church (Acts 1:14). I consider the *Baptism in the Spirit* as the ecumenical grace of "recovered fraternity" (Ut Unum Sint n.41). Since 600 million Christians

from all contemporary churches shared the same experience, this experience does in fact convey the unity between Churches.²⁷

The *Baptism in the Spirit* is the tool used by the Lord for Christian unity. There are no other models. Others proposed models based on social justice, on the quest for peace and ecology, are just as valid. But Catholic Charismatic Renewal is represented by the *Baptism in the Spirit*.

At this point our question is: how can we live the unity if the Churches often differ from the ecclesiological and doctrinal standpoint?

To this regard we wish to acknowledge the invitation of renowned Protestant theologian *Oscar Cullman*: "To live unity through diversity and division".

To love one another despite the differences! To love one another in diversity! Namely, to accept *kénosis*, emptiness, suffering and the cross not as an obstacle but rather as a process leading to purification and communion. We ought to experience expostulation as a challenge driving us to live our identity in fullness and faithfulness.

It is my wish that other Churches understood the charisma of a Church as a gift, and that each in turn welcomed the bestowal of the reciprocal gift. When this happens, when we are open to mutual understanding within the framework of "reconciled diversities" and we incessantly are mutually purified, the division is transformed into a form of enrichment, much more than it is in superficial unity drawn up in written agreements.

In the words of Cardinal Martini and Cardinal Ratzinger *"Ecumenical undertaking towards full unity cannot be merely understood as a return to the Church. This path requires that each one engage in a conversion that promotes faithfulness to the only Lord and Master"*.²⁸ *"Not a call to return to Rome, but a hope that is placed in the hands of the Lord"*.²⁹

I view the Church as one "holy, Catholic and apostolic" Church, called by Jesus, and proclaimed in the profession of faith. One Church, since the sharing out and distribution of charismas, ministries and activities within the Church is marked by "the same Spirit", "the same Lord", "the same God who works all in all" (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-6). From the presence and action of the same Spirit and the same Lord stems reason and the assurance of the unity of the Church!

One of the prejudices I most dislike is that ecumenism is but a flare that is bound to wear out. I am clearly not of this opinion since I believe in the Holy Spirit: He is the one who will realize the unity, through the ways that He only knows!

There is obviously the work of evil, which since the onset has been the originator of all divisions and fabrications. But there is also the work of the Holy Spirit!

We persevere in the unremitting belief that unity is possible, that full communion in Christ and in the only Church of Christ will return as a gift and not as a demand. It's a potholed and 'crucial' – indeed, derivative of 'cross' – path. It is unpredictable but with no going back.³⁰

²⁷ Cf. Card. Léon J. Suenens, *Ecumenismo e Rinnovamento Carismatico*, theological and pastoral guidelines, Malines Document n° 2. Edizioni Paoline, Rome 1978.

²⁸ *Sto alla porta*, n. 36, page. 73, Centro Ambrosiano di Documentazione e Studi Religiosi, Milan 1992

²⁹ Cf. Interview with Time magazine reported by Avvenire, Dossier Catholica, Tuesday December 28 1993, p. 3.

³⁰ For further details see *Direttorio per l'applicazione dei principi e delle norme dell'ecumenismo*, Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, Magisterium n. 207, Edizioni Paoline 1993; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Decree on <<Ecumenism>>, 11. 21.1964, Documenti del Concilio Vaticano II, Massimo Milano - U.C.I.I.M. Rome 1971.

This is the spirit that has marked the prayer encounters of Catholic Charismatic Renewal with members of other Christian Churches over the past years, since Jesus has taught us to ceaselessly address our prayers to God the Father that there may be unity among all His disciples (John 17:21). And His prayer is infallible and will not remain unattended.

Based on my personal experiences, this happens in many areas of the world. I wish to mention a few of these cases. The first is the ministry of Reconciliation of the Community of Jesus that I chair. It is a Catholic Covenant Community, which operates in the ecumenical environment and promotes the following:

- *The Italian Charismatic Consultation (ICC)*, for Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue in Italy;
- *Comunión Renovada de Evangélicos y Católicos en el Espíritu Santo (CRECES)* Catholic-Evangelicals dialogue in Argentina;
- *Encontro de Cristãos na Busca de Unidade e Santidade (ENCRISTUS)* Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue in Brazil.
- *United in Christ*, for Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue in USA;
- *Kairòs: International Meeting for peace between nations – yearly Ecumenical Conference held in Bari, Italy;*
- *International Dialogue between Catholics and Messianic Jews* held in Bari, Italy;
- *International Praise and Adoration Conferences between Catholics and Non-denominational Christians* Bari, Italy.

Along with other international groups for dialogue:

- *“Gathering in the Holy Spirit” between Roman Catholic and New Charismatic Churches*, sponsored by Centro Pro-Unione in Rome;
- *Towards Jerusalem Council II (TJCII)* for the dialogue between *Messianic Jews and Christians*, in the USA;
- *International Charismatic Consultation (ICC)* seated in United Kingdom;
- *Catholics and Evangelicals together (USA)*;
- *Christians Together* – Bath and Bristol Church Leadership, UK.

“*Empowerment 21*” provides solace with the assurance that we are not alone in this struggle. Dialogue ought to be stepped up and promoted with courage. “*Empowerment 21*” bears living and effective witness to this.

For Catholic Charismatic Renewal it is not a matter of undertaking the fatigues of reconciliation like a game of diplomacy or as a humanly shrewd strategy. Indeed, the question consists in the consuming and determined effort of “gathering up the scattered boughs”, that the Church’s majestic tree, devastated by the thunderbolts of our divisions may return more beautiful and stronger than before.

Is it a dream or a possibility?

Both!

In a historical moment such as today's, whereby relations between the historical Churches represented at the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva³¹ are described as experiencing an "ecumenical winter", Catholic Charismatic Renewal may represent another occasion for hope in the progress of Christian unity.

The Valdese Pastor Paolo Ricca said in Geneva, "The greatest risk to which the ecumenical movement is exposed is related to rhetoric: to the countless statements and documents that are not reflected in practical implementation. We have been divided for over 400 years and certainly a document will not act as the decisive reconciler. Conversely, interior change ought to occur, namely: a <<third way>>".³²

Catholic Charismatic Renewal could turn out to be the "third way" leading to the achievement of unity that Jesus proclaims to the Father (cf John 17:21).

As Pope John Paul II declared, true unity can only occur after mutual repentance for past sins and true reconciliation has taken place:

"We cannot come before Christ, the Lord of history, as divided as we have unfortunately been in the course of the second millennium. These divisions must give way to rapprochement and harmony; the wounds on the path of Christian unity must be healed".³³

" Among the sins which require a greater commitment to repentance and conversion should certainly be counted those which have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People".³⁴

"These sins of the past unfortunately still burden us and remain ever present temptations. It is necessary to make amends for them and earnestly to beseech Christ's forgiveness".³⁵

Also all of us convened here could meet this appeal and seek to heal the wounds of the past with forgiveness and prayer.

And even the slanderous language characterizing certain Catholic environments marked by misunderstood anti-sect campaigns ought to be purified. A recent document of the Bishops of Latin America, granted approval by Pope Benedict XVI, encourages ecumenical efforts and addresses the other Churches and Christian denominations with words of respect; no longer contemptuously describing them as "sects", as happened in the past.³⁶

³¹ "The Council of Geneva only represents a minority of world Christianity. Indeed, most Pentecostal Churches, along with the Evangelical Churches and communities, the independent Churches in Africa and Asia, and notably the Roman Catholic Church are not WCC members. How can WCC continue being understood as the most represented ecumenical organization at global level if it represents only a minority of Christian Churches in the world? It is therefore necessary to expand the ecumenical partnership" (Konrad Raiser, WCC general secretary, Valdese Faculty, Rome Nov. 1998). On the occasion of the 8th WCC Harare Assembly (Zimbabwe), held December 3-14 1998, participants included all those who had never previously participated such as 29 preeminent representatives of traditional Pentecostal Church among whom figured Rev. Harold D. Hunter (Holiness Church), Rev. Dr. Cecil M. Robeck (Assemblies of God). Invitations were equally sent to Charismatic Renewal representatives. These included Fr. Kilian McDonnell (Catholic), Fr. Michael Harper (Orthodox) and the leaders of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship. During the Assembly participants agreed on the establishment of a *Forum of Christian Churches and Organizations* leading to the creation of an "Ecumenical panel" open to Catholics, Pentecostals and Evangelicals.

³² On the occasion of a Symposium of ecumenical leaders and theologians in Geneva for the 25th anniversary of the Leuenberg Agreement. *Avvenire*, Catholica page 20, Thursday November 19 1998.

³³ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen* n°4, May 2 1995.

³⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen* n°17, May 2 1995.

³⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* n° 34, November 10 1994.

³⁶ V Conferência Geral do Episcopado Latino Americano e do Caribe (CELAM), Aparecida, 13-31 de maio de 2007, Documento Final, 5.5.1 *Diálogo ecumênico para que o mundo creia*.

Already in the past the Holy See asked not to address the Evangelical Churches with the term “sect”,³⁷ since it does not correspond to the traditional notion of religious sociology, nor is it the appropriate language to be used in addressing respectable Christian Churches, such as the Pentecostal Churches, with whom, through the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, the Vatican has established ongoing fruitful theological dialogue since the Second Vatican Council period.³⁸

Indeed, the Catholic Church must acknowledge what is owed to the Pentecostal Evangelical Movement: the merit of having given birth and disseminated Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the US starting in the 1960s, which today is present in all corners of the world amongst some 150 million Catholics.

³⁷ In May 1993 Dr. Edward Cleary, who co-authored a book on Latin-American Pentecostals with Hannah Stewart-Gambino, proffered to Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy a document requesting that the Vatican remove Pentecostalism from the <<sect>> category. *Ecumenical Newsletter*, July 1994. On the occasion of the Bishops’ Synod Assembly for America Cardinal Cassidy delivered the following statement: “I call upon the Assembly to pay special care not to use the term <<sects>>. As is wisely underlined in the *Instrumentum laboris*, <<the situation of new religious movements and sects is extremely complex>> (n.45). “Christian denominations are deeply offended when they are understood as non-Christian organizations and new religious movements. Often we fail to distinguish between sectarian behaviors and sects. There may be sectarian attitudes in Christian Churches or communities, but a Christian Church or Community must never be described as a sect”. Address by the President of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity at the Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for America: *Ecumenical Aspects*, November 16 – December 13 1997, Third General Congregation, November 18 1997 in *Service d’information*, Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, n° 97 (1998/I-II), page 10, Vatican City. At times there have been objective closures vis a vis certain expressions of Pentecostalism (Cf. Church Pastoral Commitment before new religious movements and sects, CEI Pastoral Note, E.P. 1993, Magisterium n°204, page 15 n° 8). However, “in those circumstances where the Pentecostal world is unjustly marginalized, attacked or satirized, equally hostile reactions or closure are to be expected. Conversely, in those situations whereby – honestly acknowledging past mistakes – the path of dialogue is disclosed, it can be expected that within the Pentecostal mosaic the brightest tiles, those capable of constituting a source of richness for the entire community of Christians in dialogue, will shine”. (Msgr. Giuseppe Casale in *Aspettando la Pentecoste e Op. cit.* page 9).

³⁸ Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the traditional Pentecostal Churches and other Pentecostal religious leaders. Reports on the four stages of the Dialogue, *Service d’information*, Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, Vatican City. John Paul XXIII invited Pastor David Du Plessis, minister of the Assemblies of God as official observer to the Second Vatican Council. He was the first to co-chair – along with Benedictine Fr. Kilian McDonnel – the mixed Commission for dialogue between the Vatican and the Pentecostal Churches. A friend of Pope Paul VI, Pentecostal pastor Rev. Du Plessis is a recipient of the Templeton prize. The award is conferred by the Catholic Church in recognition of distinguished commitment in the realm of faith and Christianity (past recipients include Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolari Movement, Billy Bright, founder and president of the Campus Crusade for Christ, and many others).