

Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement

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History:

One of the many spiritual renewals within the Catholic Church, the Charismatic Renewal Movement, started in **1967** when a handful of students and university theology professors from the **Duquesne University in Pittsburgh**, Pennsylvania, got together for a retreat weekend. From there it spread to the university campuses of South Bend, Ind. and East Lansing, Mich. in 1968.

In contrast with the Pentecostal Movement that started with poor ethnic groups in downtown Los Angeles, the Catholic Renewal started with students and professors of universities. See [Pentecostal Movement](#).

From this small and inconspicuous beginning, by 1990, in 23 years, the movement had grown to include more than 100 million Catholics in over 238 nations. **Fr. Thomas Foster, S.J.**, Diocese of San Jose, California, is the United States Bishop's Liaison to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal,

Many believe that this Charismatic Renewal is a direct result of Pope John XXIII prayer at Vatican II, *"O Holy Spirit... pour forth the fullness of your gifts... Renew your wonders in this day as by a new Pentecost"*.

Some of the Catholic leadership of the new movement were Ralph Martin, Steve Clark, Kevin Ranaghan, and Father Jim Ferry.

By 1972 **Leo Joseph Cardinal Suenens**, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels, of Belgium (1904-96), personally encountered the Charismatic Renewal during a visit to the United States. He was immediately taken by this encounter, appealing as it did to his keen desire to see the Church flourish as in a new Pentecost through the work of the Holy Spirit, and for him, this amounted to a life-long goal as a spokesman and the movement's sponsor within the Roman hierarchy.

In many ways Cardinal Suenens was an unlikely person to carry the banner for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Personally reserved, even shy, overly intellectual... as captured by Cardinal Danneels in his funeral homily, *"how could a cardinal with a face that did not show many emotions, with a straight and immobile stature, with a grave and steady voice, find himself at ease in the midst of a crowd that sang, danced, clapped hands and spoke in tongues?"*.

Doctrine:

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal centers on the renewal of individual commitment to the person of Jesus Christ in His Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, as in the day of Pentecost of Acts 2.

The individuals in the Charismatic Renewal believe that they have been "filled" or "baptized" with the Holy Spirit, often through the laying on of the hands. The signs of the "baptism" or "filling" may include joy, the gifts of speaking in tongues or glossolalia, resting in the Spirit or slaying in the Spirit, prophecy, healing, interpretation of tongues, discernment of spirits... the 9 spiritual gifts of 1Cor.12:8-10.

This commitment has been the center of every authentic renewal in the history of the Church. It begins by the re-anointing with the presence of the Holy Spirit, like in any Pentecost in the Bible, and it is primarily a renewal of the gifts received in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. It is a renewal in the elements of the Gospel that are central, not optional: The covenant love of the Father, the Lordship of Jesus, the power of the Spirit, sacramental and community life, prayer, Charisms and the necessity of evangelization...

The results are many. Along with the reception and use of the Charisms, people talk of a new and deeper personal knowledge and commitment to Jesus in his Church. They find a new power and meaning of all kinds of prayer, a new love of the scriptures, a new and deeper appreciation of the Church, of the sacraments, of the liturgy, of the Pope, of the Blessed Mother, of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, of the rosary, of the way of the cross...

The essence and life of any Charismatic, is a life of joyfully praising the Lord, and service, helping his neighbor who is another Christ (Mt.25:31-46)... the same as the results of any of the seven Pentecost experiences of the New Testament:

In fact, **the first Charismatic** of the New Testament is **Blessed Virgin Mary**, as related in Mat.1 and Lk.1: In the first Pentecost of the NT Virgin Mary was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus incarnated in her. And with Jesus within her, she did the two things all good Charismatic should do:

- 1- She went immediately **to serve**, to help her cousin Elisabeth who was six months pregnant at old age (Lk.1:36, 39-45).
- 2- She joyfully **sang the praises of the Lord** in her Magnificat (Lk.1:46-56).

The Greek term **"Charism"** or "charisma" denote any good gift that flows from God's benevolent love



(*charis*) unto man, through the Holy Spirit. The plural is "Charisms" or "charismata".

It is a **"Movement"**, not an Organization nor a Society. As a Movement, it has religious and laymen leaders, directors of charismatic centers and events, but it doesn't have president, secretary, treasurer, etc. as any organization or society would have... and in fact, the exercise of any authority in the Movement has been the root of most of its failures.



Popes Statements:

The Renewal caught the attention of the Church, and the leaders of the movement met Pope Paul VI (1975) as well as Pope John Paul II several times. In addition. The actual Pope, Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Ratzinger, and several bishops' conferences, of various countries, have written pastoral letters of encouragement and support for the movement.

Pope Paul VI: Speaking to the International Conference on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal on May 19, 1975, encouraged the attendees in their renewal efforts and especially to remain anchored in the Church.

1975 marks the year of the Renewal's "coming of age" in the Catholic Church. Thanks to Veronica O'Brian's urging of cardinal Suenens and the cardinal's convincing recommendation to Pope Paul VI, the Renewal was invited to have its World Congress at Rome on Pentecost during the Holy Year. **Pope Paul VI told the group** of 10,000 Charismatics: *"Nothing is more necessary to this more and more secularized world than the witness of the 'spiritual renewal' that we see the Holy Spirit evoking in the most diverse regions and milieu... How then could this 'spiritual renewal' not be a 'chance' for the Church and for the world? And how, in this case, could one not take all the means to insure that it remains so?"*.

Pope John Paul II, for his part, was also explicit. Speaking to a group of international leaders of the Renewal on December 11, 1979, he said, *I am convinced that this movement is a very important component of the entire renewal of the Church... "Remain in an attitude of constant and grateful availability for every gift that the Spirit wishes to pour into your hearts"*

Noting that since age 11 he had said a daily prayer to the Holy Spirit he added, *This was my own spiritual initiation, so I can understand all these Charisms. They are all part of the richness of the Lord. I am convinced that this movement is a sign of his action.*

Pope Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, has added his voice to the Pope John Paul II in acknowledging the good occurring in the Charismatic Renewal and providing some cautions.

In a forward to a book by Cardinal Suenens, at that time the Pope's delegate to the Charismatic Renewal, the Prefect comments on the Post-Conciliar period stating, *At the heart of a world imbued with a rationalistic skepticism, a new experience of the Holy Spirit suddenly burst forth. And, since then, that experience has assumed a breadth of a worldwide Renewal movement. What the New Testament tells us about the Charisms - which were seen as visible signs of the coming of the Spirit - is not just ancient history, over and done with, for it is once again becoming extremely topical.*

The actual Pope urges those who read the book to pay special attention to the author's double plea,... **to those responsible for the ecclesiastical ministry - from parish priests to bishops - not to let the Renewal pass them by but to welcome it fully; and on the other (hand) ... to the members of the Renewal to cherish and maintain their link with the whole Church and with the Charisms of their pastors.** [Renewal and the Powers of Darkness, Leo Cardinal Suenens (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1983)]

Vatican II said this about the Charisms: *"It is not only through the sacraments and Church ministries that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God. He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank... 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit' (1Cor. 12:7). These charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church" (L.G. 12).*

The bishops of the United States, in their pastoral letter to the American Church on the Charismatic Renewal, wrote the following in 1984: *"... the Charismatic Renewal is rooted in the witness of the gospel tradition: Jesus is Lord by the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father"*

Encouraged by the leadership of Pope Paul VI and John Paul II, many Catholic bishops of the United States, Canada, Mexico, South America, and Europe have written pastoral statements supporting and encouraging the Renewal.

Priests and bishops should love the Charismatics, and take good care of them...The Catholic Charismatic Renewal as a movement within the Catholic Church.

"Obedience" is love, the evidence to be a good charismatic, like Virgin Mary. [Charismatics and Virgin Mary](#): The Mother of Jesus, the Spouse of the Spirit, your Mother!.

[Obedience, Heart of the Bible](#) - [Obedience in the Bible](#) - [Obedience in the Gospels, of Jesus](#)

In the Church... in the Parish:

The obvious conclusion of the previous considerations is that the Charismatic Catholic Renewal is "in" the Church and "for" the Church, not alongside the Church. It is at the heart of the Church, and it has an important role in parish renewal.

And it is explosive, as anything moved by the fire and the hurricane wind of the Holy Spirit. Remember?... in 23 years, the Movement became a 70 million Catholics experience in 120 nations, from a handful of Catholics in Pittsburgh... and this explosiveness of love and praise and service, can be a fact in your parish.

Every Catholic priest and bishop should try to understand and guide and help the Charismatics: They are not "invited guests" to the parish or the diocese, but "real Catholic members" of them. It is a great sin for any Catholic priest or bishop to disdain the Charismatics as nothing or strangers, or even don't care about them.

The Prayer Groups:

The meetings of the Charismatics are usually called "Prayer Groups", and they are usually full of joy and enthusiasm, praising the Lord and helping the brethren, singing and clapping hands, and even dancing... their main purpose is to give glory to God our Father through our Lord Jesus Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Most of the meetings consist of praising God with spontaneous prayers and singing, because "he who prays singing, prays twice". These periods of prayer will be punctuated by scripture readings and commentaries, sharing, prayers for the particular needs of individuals... and the specific practice of any spiritual gift by any of the attendants, as the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, mighty deeds (miracles), prophecy, discernment of spirits, variety of tongues, interpretation of tongues... anything that may praise the Lord or be of help to the brethren!. By the way, the gift of tongues is mentioned 57 times in the New Testament, it is biblical!, you know?.

If you ever attend a Prayer Group and there is not joy and enthusiasm, it is a death Prayer Group!. And, by the way, if in your life or your Catholic meetings there is not joy and enthusiasm, but kind of boring or tedious or a tiresome affair, the Charismatic Renewal may be a good remedy for your life or for your Catholic meetings, praise the Lord!.

Actually, the meeting of the Charismatics try to follow the recommendations of St. Paul, which are the best remedies for your life and meetings: Not to get drunk with wine, but with the Holy Spirit:

- *"Do not get drunk with wine and the ruin that goes with it, but be filled with the Holy Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, praying and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Eph.5:18-20).*

- *"When you assemble, one has a psalm, another an instruction, a revelation, or speaking in tongues, or interpreting what has been said in tongues. Everything should be done for building up the Church" (1Cor.14:26).*

- *"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks to God, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil" (1Thes.5:16-22).*

The Prayer Meeting is usually and explosive one, and it is of the utmost importance that the Pastor or the priests of the Parish are interested and constantly aware of what is going on in the Prayer Group, or in some larger Assemblies that are actually being run in some parishes. And if it is possible, to attend them regularly, or at least often, by one of the priests of the Parish, who are always more than welcome to the meetings of the Prayer Groups. In fact, a priest of the Parish should be the main leader of each Prayer Group in the Parish.

This way of living the Prayer Meetings is to be lived in everyday life, at home, at work, in the neighborhood...the Prayer Meeting is but an example of what should be our entire lives, and the opportunity to recharge our batteries, to renew our lives again and again. But all our life should be like a continuation of the Prayer Meeting: Always with joy and enthusiasm, praising the Lord with thanksgiving always and in all circumstances, which is the way to pray constantly, with the spirit of Service, of helping others in their material and spiritual needs, most specially with emphasis in the evangelization.

Charismatic Retreats, Assemblies:

There are many kinds of Charismatic Retreats: Of one day, a weekend, for young people, Married Encounters for a weekend, Assemblies for a few hours on Sundays...

We have all of these in New York in the Hispanic Catholic Charismatic Center in the Bronx, with great success. For the weekend retreats, of adults, youngsters, and married couples, they usually come over 200 persons to each one of them, and they come out with a great enthusiasm and eagerness to evangelize.

All of them are directed and personally supervised by Bishop Josu Iriondo, the Director of the Catholic Charismatic Center and the Vicar for the Hispanics in New York City.

The Seminaries in the Spirit:

These Seminaries in the Spirit, are groups who meet for seven consecutive weeks, on the same day of the week, for 3 hours at night, to be instructed and guided into the Charismatic Movement. They are carried out in different parishes, and often several Seminaries are going on at the same dates. They are directed in New York personally by Bishop Josu Iriondo and also supervised by the priests of the Parish.

We had "a problem", 30 years ago: Every day, there are two talks, and at the end of the day, each participant is given 7 quotations of the Bible to meditate during the 7 days of that week. There are a total of about 140 Bible quotations. The schemes of the talks and the quotations for the meditations were great, but all the Bible quotations, 30 years ago, did not include any related with the Eucharist, the Blessed Mother, the Pope, the Sacrament of Baptism, Baptism of children, Purgatory, priests, nuns... and it was enough to include a few of those treasures each day, and the problem was solved... and the Seminaries in the Spirit have given great results among the Hispanics of New York ... but watch out in your Diocese, take a good look at the Bible quotations!.

Accomplishments and Ecumenism:

The main accomplishments of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are those already commented, mainly:

1- A deeper individual commitment to Christ in the Church, and an emphasis in the divine action of the Holy Spirit, much forgotten by many. In the last decades have been written more books on the Holy Spirit than of any other religious matter, and now even critics of the Renewal place Him and adore Him as the center of the work of the Church and the life of the individuals, where He always should be.

2- A new and deeper way of living the treasures of the Catholic Church: Prayer, Sacraments, specially the Holy Mass, obedience and faithfulness to the Pope, our bishop, and our pastor and priests, a more meaningful and deeper devotion to our Blessed Mother, pray with more meaning the Rosary and the Way of the Cross...

3- Evangelization: Helping the people at home, at work, in the parish, and all our neighbors in general to a deeper commitment of themselves to the glorious adventure of Christianity in the Church. And doing this with our words, but mainly with our lives lived continually with the joy and enthusiasm of a child who trust continually in his Father, who has nothing by himself but who has everything in his Father who loves him.

4- The explosiveness of this Movement, both in the commitment and in the rapid expansion. Often, theologians and old priests and nuns are surprised and even jealous when they see their old quiet parishioners now preaching with enthusiasm the Good News, and praying in tongues, or healing the sick, or casting out devils, or fighting abortion, or any kind of apostolic action, or claiming to have ecstasies like St. Therese by Resting in the Spirit... and always with joy, no matter the problems or criticisms... claiming with their lives that the greatest love is the love of Jesus, and the greatest sorrow is the sorrow of not having Him... the Charismatic, as a good Catholic, wants to have a thousand friends to sing louder the praises of the Lord, because the purpose of our lives on earth is just to adore God... and adore Him mainly doing His Will in our daily lives, always trusting in Him no matter what it may happen...

... Lord: What you promised yesterday I will have it today. My hands are empty, but I lay them on the sick, and they will be healed with your love, and healed their body, spirit and soul shall be!. Forgive me Lord, for that beggar who I didn't wanted to look at, he was you!... and for that rich or poor person, or for that greedy or proud or presumptuous one to whom I denied my respect and understanding, he was you!... Open my eyes, Lord, look at me, and let me see You in every good or bad neighbor that I may meet, because he is You! (Mt.25:31-46).

5- More love and understanding of the Bible. Every Charismatic, both laymen and religious, all of a sudden read more often the holy scriptures with a deeper sense of life in the Word of God.

6- Music: The Charismatic Renewal has produced good soft and joyful music.

7- Ecumenism: The Charismatic Movement have unequivocally proved to be a united feature among the different groups of Christianity. However it has been hardly criticized by leaders of the main Protestant denominations and Catholics, most often for misunderstandings of the meanings of the baptism with the Spirit, the glossolalia, the Resting in the Spirit, the practice of the gifts of the Spirit... and sometimes just for jealousy of its explosive success... a jealous one dared to say, "the charismatic movement is a catalyst for building the ecumenical one-world church of the Antichrist", when actually is exactly the opposite, it is building bonds of unity in the different groups of the Church of Christ!.

Problems?:

Many!. Even Jesus had problems with his chosen 12!. Remember Judas, and Peter, and the 11 at Calvary?... clean waters are always moving, even with waves; calmed waters become putrid ponds.

Here are some of the many problems:

1- Simplicity: Some Charismatics are not well instructed in the Catholic Church treasures, they live like the first Christians who didn't had the advantage of the doctrines of the Church for 2000 years, and some of them don't know the Catechism, not even how to pray the Our Father or the Hail Mary, even when you see them preaching with enthusiasm and effectiveness... the priests are really badly needed in the Prayer Groups. Most Charismatics are humble enough to receive instructions, and very thankful for them.

2- "Amnesia" of the Blessed Mother: In New York we had the problem that some Charismatics didn't care about Virgin Mary, because the Holy Spirit and Jesus and the Father were more than enough for them... we started to emphasize the fact that the Mother of Jesus was the "first Charismatic" of the New Testament, as commented above, and now most of the Hispanic Prayer Groups start their prayer meeting with the prayer of the Rosary, praise the Lord!.

3- Disobedience: Very few Charismatics think they don't have to listen to the priests because the Holy Spirit talks to them directly, and that's enough for them and the best. And usually, a good explanation is received humbly and with gratefulness: The Holy Spirit, all along the Bible, uses people to guide and instruct us: Moses, David, Isaiah, the Apostles, the Church... obedience is love... *"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me"* (Lk.10:16)... but priests are very much needed to take care of errors like this as soon as possible.

4- The Hierarchy: Another not usual error, but that happens: "We don't need bosses!". The one person I encounter with this error, was very grateful when I explained to him that the Spirit usually acts through the one in charge, through the legitimate authority: In Cana, Jesus didn't give the wine to the people, but told the servants "to take it to the headwaiter", and the headwaiter was the one who decided what to do with the wine (Jn.2:8). The "headwaiter" was representing the Holy Spirit there. In the family, the "headwaiter" is the husband. In the Prayer Meeting, the leader. In the Church, the priest, or the pastor, or the bishop... we should never do anything without the approval of the "headwaiter". We should do as Jesus did...

5- Another error: "I only need Jesus. Religion doesn't save, nor any church, only Jesus". I told someone with this error that the relation with Jesus, that's religion, because "religion" is the relation with man with God, and Jesus is God, as he well believed. And then, I told him that Jesus in person did not brought him to the Prayer Group, it was a relative or a friend, and he is representing the Church, he is the Church in action!... and Jesus did not baptized him, nor instructed him, but a priest or a laymen, representing the Church. Jesus left us His Church to proclaim the Gospel. If

you would have lived in Africa, may be you would had never even heard about Jesus, because the Church is not there...

6- Some Protestant errors may infiltrate the Prayer Group: About the Pope, the Eucharist, Virgin Mary, Purgatory, Baptism of children... and any of these errors should be tackled immediately, because the Charismatic is usually open, until he thinks of himself as an "elder" or a "somebody".

7- Money: The Charismatics are usually very generous, and they want to buy all the tapes and material they can to learn more about Christ. And a temptation for any Charismatic leader is to set up his or her own Group, to "administer" by himself the money that comes on every service, without any other church authority to supervise him.... watch out!.

8- Within the Prayer Groups: Envy or jealousy: A person has envy or jealousy because other has a Charisma he would like to have: Healing, prophecy, speaking, singing...

9- The Charismatic Renewal is a Movement, not an Organization or Society, with religious and laymen leaders and directors, but without president, secretary, etc.... and the exercise of any kind of authority has been often the root of failures in the Renewal Movement.

9- The 7 weeks **Seminary in the Spirit**. See above "the problem".

The Charismatic Renewal Movement has produce myriad groups, good preachers and healers, and a few near-cult offshoots. Most Charismatics, however are orthodox in doctrine and emphasize activity within the Church, and under its legitimate authority and teachings. But priests and deacons and nuns are very much needed in the Prayer Groups to show many in the Charismatic Renewal how to integrate their new enthusiasm for religious experience blessed by the gifts of the Spirit into the faith and practice of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

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