

IDENTITY OF THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL IN THE CHURCH

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Foundress

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The Importance of a Clear Identity

"Through a return to memory we achieve a livelier consciousness of our own identity" (cf. John Paul II, Memory and Identity). It is so necessary for the Charismatic Renewal to make memory of what God has done through it within His Church. To make memory is to discover and to define the history that God has written through His intervention and in His response to man. The Renewal ought to find its history and make memory in order to discover its identity. Identity is our being. What is the Charismatic Renewal? How did it come about? What is its origin? What is its purpose? What happened at its beginning, and how does it come to fulfill its reason for being? How long has it existed?



Only he who is sure of his identity can fulfill the purpose for which God gave him existence. Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1,38). The Virgin recognized her identity first. She first understood who she was and the essence of her being. She then responded with totality – from who she was – to fulfill the designs of God. We too have to understand the identity of the Renewal so that, with a clear vision of its essence, it can fulfill with clarity its mission in the Church.

To Make Memory

The Renewal in the Holy Spirit came forth at a time in which paths were being laid out for the renewal of the Church, and it was desired, ordained and inaugurated by the Vatican Council II. On the 25th of January, 1959, His Holiness John XXIII announced his desire to convoke an Ecumenical Council, and he did so formally on the 25th of December, 1961 with this prayer: "Divine Spirit, renew your wonders in this year as if it were a new Pentecost and concede that your Church, praying perseveringly and insistently with a single heart and mind together with Mary the Mother of Jesus, and guided by Peter, may promote the reign of your Divine Savior, the reign of justice, love and peace."

In this prayer, the Pope wanted to manifest the three dimensions of the Church at the Cenacle, which received the graces of Pentecost:

- The prayer dimension: The Church in prayer, having a unity of mind and heart
- The Marian dimension: The Church with Mary, receiving the effects of Her maternity
- The Ecclesial dimension: The Church in communion with Peter, in the Heart of the Church

These are the three conditions for a full experience of Pentecost: prayer, Mary and ecclesial union. The fruit is the proclamation of Christ as Savior and promotion of His reign. In other words, it is the offering of one's heart and all of one's self in order to experience the effects of His salvation and to live according to the spirit of love, in fraternal and mature relationships that establish a new civilization.

How does it come about?

The Charismatic Renewal did not have a founder or foundress. Instead it began as a direct intervention of the Holy Spirit within a group of people. It was not a humanly planned event, but rather it occurred in an unexpected and spontaneous way. It came about during a climate of expectation in the Church; a council has just finished, and this council had asked for the spiritual renewal of the whole Church.

•In the fall of 1966, by the action of the Holy Spirit, various Catholic professors from the University of Duquesne began to gather frequently in fervent prayer and in conversation about their lives of faith. Each one noticed that there was a certain void, a lack of dynamism, and a spiritual weakness in their prayers and activities. Conscious that the strength of the primitive Christian community was the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they began to pray that the Divine Spirit would manifest its power in them. They began to ask the Holy Spirit to renew them and to fill their lives with His power. They prayed for each other, "Come Holy Spirit!"

•A few weeks later, as they were in prayer, they received the anointing or baptism in the Spirit. On February 30 some other people participated in a retreat at the university and began to claim the power of the Holy Spirit; they too were filled with His power.

•It moved from there, and similar events occurred in Notre Dame, then in Michigan...The Charismatic Renewal was born! All began with a small flame in Pittsburgh. Thanks to the uncontainable force of the Spirit, this flame spread itself like wildfire, invading the five continents of the earth. This fire ignited with uncontrollable ardor, and in just a few years, the Renewal, which began in a small room like the first Cenacle, has now spread throughout the entire world. All that is of God is born small because it is the force of the Holy Spirit that

causes it to spread. The only thing necessary is to be present in the Cenacle and then to leave there as a living witness, with the power of the Spirit, the power of the fire that was received.

WHAT IS THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL?

I will give you definitions that have been voiced by recent Supreme Pontiffs on different occasions.

1. A gift of the HS

The Charismatic Renewal – in its essence, experience and characteristics – has been defined by the Church as a gift of the Spirit for our historic moment. It is a charism of actualization of the grace of Pentecost. What is a charism of the Holy Spirit? It is a free, supernatural gift in a historic moment that is given for the common good, for the edification of the Body of Christ. In the particular case of the Charismatic Renewal, the gift of the Holy Spirit did not begin with a person, but with a group, thus making actual the experience of Pentecost. “Thanks to the Charismatic Movement, a multitude of Christians, men and women, young people and adults have rediscovered Pentecost as a living reality in their daily lives.” (Celebration of First Vespers of Pentecost, Homily of John Paul II, Saturday, May 29, 2004).

2. A Religious Occurrence

Now, if it is a gift that manifests itself in a historic event, then it is also an occurrence. Therefore, it has also been defined as “a spiritual event,” a fruit of the Holy Spirit that takes place in a historic moment. It is an event that is the fruit of the prayers of John XXIII, the prayers of the Council Fathers, and the frequent addresses of Paul VI that invoked the gift of the Holy Spirit for the Church. In their ardent cooperation with the Holy Spirit, these Pastors interceded and supplicated that the grace and event of Pentecost may repeat itself again with a “new force.”

3. One of the Graces of the Second Vatican Council (C. Ratzinger)

Many theologians said that the Church entered a “wintertime” after the Council. It was even said that it seemed as if, after the great flowering of the Council, a deep frost penetrated the springtime and fatigue replaced the new dynamism. It seemed as if the dynamism was everywhere except in the Church. On the other hand, many others – including entire nations and political systems – wanted to see a world without God. Some others asked themselves, “Where is God? Does not the Church, after having desired renewal so much, now find itself immersed in a storm?” But then there was suddenly something that was not planned by anyone. In this time, the Holy Spirit – if we can say it this way – asked to speak out again. By this action of the Holy Spirit, faith was renewed in young men and women, and they experienced the living God.

The Holy Spirit inspired the Church, through the Council, to implore for and desire renewal, and He himself sent the graces necessary to bring it about. The Charismatic Renewal has been understood by the recent Popes as one of the graces of the Holy Spirit so ardently asked for in the Council, conceded to the Church in a moment of great difficulty. This definition should always be understood: one of the graces, together with many others, of the perennial action of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

The Charismatic Renewal has not invented something new; it has not added something novel to what has already existed in the heart and the history of the Church. The history of the Church is a 2000 year history of the action of the Holy Spirit. Everything is rooted in the perpetual Pentecost in which the Church lives. All the gifts that He brings to fruition in the Church need to be embraced with gratitude (LG 12), and in reality our prayer must always be that the Holy Spirit infuse His power in the Church, increasing her charisms (holiness, before all else) in order to make it more fruitful.

- The Charismatic Renewal revitalizes what already exists. For this reason it is a gift of profound spiritual renewal which can be found within all states of life and in all areas. It is a fire that is disposed to enflame all people and to ignite the entire Church.

- The experience of the Renewal is fruit of what has already existed in the Church. Experience does not come before existence; rather, lived experience is an aspect of what the Church teaches us, and it is part of its life, part of the treasure it possesses in its maternal womb.

- Christianity is first a state of being, and then from that being we have experiences. For example, the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church; it is its strength, its light, its wisdom, its fruitfulness. What has the Renewal experienced? Only this.

- The experience is the living actualization of the truth already contained in the center of the Church. The Charismatic Renewal encompasses both the existence and the experience; it takes from what already exists in the life of the Church, and it experiences it in its own life. It has a particular identity in which the truths of the faith have been understood through a living experience.

4. Actualization of the interior effects and the exterior signs of Pentecost

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Church after the Council directed our gaze toward the Cenacle. In order to understand profoundly this renewal in the Holy Spirit desired by God in our days, it is necessary to look upon the experience the Apostles had on Pentecost Sunday and to weigh each one of the elements or signs that constitute the unending richness of the Spirit's effusion.

The extraordinary effusion of the Spirit upon those present at the Cenacle was manifested with certain external signs that orientate our attention to and uncover, as much as it is possible, the internal experience of

the Spirit in the Apostles. The signs are real, and their purpose is to direct us to the interior actions that they signify.

Events of Pentecost:

Personal conversion, openness to the charisms, formation of a community, and the power to evangelize.

Signs of Pentecost:

Wind: The Holy Spirit is not seen but His actions are real. He blows when He wants and how He wants, and the only thing necessary for the accomplishment of His work is our docility. The wind of the Holy Spirit is perceived by the effects that He produces.

Noise: The Holy Spirit evokes praise, clamor, exclamations, tongues, and songs.

Fire: The Holy Spirit is a sanctifying fire that consumes the old man and purifies him. It causes him to burn with charity, and it moves him to be a witness of His power to the entire world. The fire of the Holy Spirit leads to holiness and mission.

Shaking of the Earth: The Holy Spirit shakes us. He moves even the most intimate areas of the human heart, removing the roots of sin and tearing away the fear that suspends and paralyzes us.

Formation of community: He causes those who receive Him to congregate in communities of love, prayer, and service.

At Pentecost we see the expressive dimension of the faith; we see the gestures that reveal what the heart lives. Our Faith is given a face and gestures. In his first meeting with the international council for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in 1979, John Paul II expressed similar sentiments, saying, "Thank you. It was an expression of faith. Indeed, the singing, the words and the gestures. It is... how does one say it? I can say that it is a revolution of this living expression of the faith. We say that the faith is a matter of the intelligence, and at times also of the heart, but this expressive dimension has been absent. This dimension of the faith was diminished, indeed inhibited, scarcely there. Now we can say that this movement is everywhere" (December 11, 1979).

Indispensable principles

For Pentecost to be, there were two indispensable principles, which can in no way be renounced: to be with the Blessed Virgin Mary and to be with Peter. In other words, the Marian principle and the Petrine principle must both be present, for they are the two fundamental pillars of the life of the Church and the action of the Holy Spirit. To live this charism in the Heart of the Church and at its service requires one to have a Marian openness to receive the Spirit, the humility of being in prayer with the Mother of the Church, and the humility of being in obedience to the Head of the Church.

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS HAVE BEEN PROPER TO THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL?

Being a grace of actualization of Pentecost, the Renewal ought to present the same characteristics of that first gift of the Holy Spirit.

1. There should be a transformation of the interior, a change of life, and a profound conversion that includes:

- A personal encounter with the living Christ as Savior and Lord and the desire to give oneself to Him.
- An inclination towards prayer, both personal and communitarian. Prayers of intercession should possess a deep trust in the power of prayer.
- A return to contemplation and praise.
- Intense meditation of the Scriptures and the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.
- An open disposition to the actions of the Holy Spirit and the discernment and interior lights He brings.
- A greater consciousness of the need for interior healing; this should lead us to encounter the wounds of our sins and the roots of our conduct and behavior.
- A freedom from obstacles and attachments in our hearts. We must remove disordered bonds, bring down walls, and allow the Holy Spirit to act with liberty.
- An awakening of the powerful action of God in the events of human life.

2. It should bring the dynamism of evangelization to edify the Church. I see the Renewal in the light of what happened on Pentecost: at the Cenacle, the apostles received the effusion of the Holy Spirit, they lost their fear, received charisms, and they went out to the entire world as witnesses of the graces they had received. Therefore the Renewal should embrace:

- A sense of community and fraternity, having groups of prayer, communities with greater commitments, and apostolates in many areas.
- A desire to proclaim to the world the fundamental kerygma, the announcement of the Gospel, to all nations and in all environments. It should have a hunger to make the Lord known.

- An openness to the charisms of the Holy Spirit: praise, tongues, prophecy, visions, intuitions, etc. There should be healings and miracles for the common good.

- Frequent conferences in order to glorify God and to meditate on His Word.

- A spirituality that touches all other spiritualities, which renews and revitalizes the spiritual currents the Holy Spirit has already brought about throughout the history of the Church. This spirituality should not lift them out from their roots, but rather infuse into them a particular strength. It should be a gift for all.

John Paul II was “convinced that this movement is a very important component of the entire renewal of the Church” (Dec. 11, 1979, speaking to a group of international Renewal leaders). As well, to the Bishops from the North of France, he spoke of the Renewal as “a grace which has come precisely to sanctify the Church and to renew in her the taste for prayer through the rediscovery, with the Holy Spirit, of the sense of gratuitousness, of joyful praise, of confidence in intercession; and this becomes a new source of evangelization” (Jan. 22, 1987). Furthermore, during a Pentecost homily, he specially spoke these words concerning the Renewal: “I hope that the spirituality of Pentecost will spread in the Church as a renewed incentive to prayer, holiness, communion and proclamation” (Celebration of First Vespers of Pentecost, Saturday, May 29, 2004).

3. It should respond to the challenges of the Church in the modern world.

Paul VI said, “It (the Charismatic Renewal) ought to rejuvenate the world, give it back a spirituality, a soul, and religious thought; it ought to reopen its closed lips to prayer and open its mouth to song, to joy, to hymns, and to witnessing...because in today’s world, we either live our faith with devotion, with depth, with energy and with joy or we will lose it” (May 19, 1975, Address at International Charismatic Renewal Conference in Rome). In other words, it is necessary to live the faith with a new strength and to evangelize with a new ardor, a new method, and a new expression, one that appeals to and reaches the heart of modern man.

Moreover, John Paul II, in a meeting with new ecclesial movements and communities, said that they are “the response, given by the Holy Spirit, to this critical challenge at the end of the millennium” (May 30, 1998, Vigil of Pentecost during the Year of the Holy Spirit).

At a dark moment the Holy Spirit has sent forth His rays of light; during a dangerous hour He has sent His comfort and His strength; during a moment of harsh cold He has sent His fire. Because of this, in the same International Conference in 1975, Paul VI said to the leaders of the Renewal, “It will be very fortuitous for our times, for the faithful, that there should be a generation...who shouts out to the world the glory and the greatness of the God of Pentecost...This grace needs to be experienced in its fullness...We live in the Church in a privileged moment of the Holy Spirit...The Church and the world need more than ever that ‘the miracle of Pentecost’ should continue in history.”

Again, we listen the words of John Paul II: “The Charismatic Renewal is an eloquent manifestation of this vitality today, a bold statement of what ‘the Spirit is saying to the churches’ (Rev. 2,7)” (May 15, 1987 at the Sixth International Assembly of the Charismatic Renewal). The world needs this action of the Holy Spirit very much, as well as many instruments for this action, because the situation of the world is very dangerous. Materialism opposes the spirit, and there are many forms of it. Because materialism is the denial of the spiritual, it requires the action of the Spirit to combat it.

However, in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (At the Beginning of the Third Millennium), Servant of God John Paul II said that in order to make memory it is necessary to discover not only the lights behind the events but also the shadows (no.6).

SOME SHADOWS

“We ought to reflect and make memory of the vicissitudes of the past, in order to discover the great lights that are present today” (cf. Memory and Identity, JP II).

Difficulties at the beginning

All of God’s works, in the process of coming to know and understand themselves and finding their identity, stumble along their way.

In the beginning of the Renewal there certainly were no lack of dangers because the action of the Holy Spirit develops within earthen vessels (2 Cor 4,7). These earthen vessels can both repress one’s free action and weaken it. We are familiar with many of these weaknesses:

- An excessive importance given to the emotional experience of the divine
- The uncontrolled search for the spectacular and the extraordinary
- A submission to rash interpretations that often deviate from the Scriptures
- A falling back that often becomes a refusal to apostolic commitment
- Independence and complacency that isolate people from the heart of the Church and Her pastors

To prevent these, we must remain in constant and grateful activity towards all the gifts the Holy Spirit desires to infuse into our hearts, but without forgetting that no charism is given that is not for the “common good” (cf. 1 Cor 12,7). The Renewal, just like any other charism, is always for the Church and finds its identity by being “church” and by remaining in communion with the Church, its pastors, its Magisterium and its pastoral

vision.

- In its beginning, while the gift opened a way for us and grew in maturity, some people in the Renewal did not understand how to fit this gift into the heart of the Church. Some even came to think that it was an indispensable grace for the survival of the Church, when in reality, what is indispensable for her life and the guarantee of all her charisms is the Church herself. All the works of God grow in the womb of the Church, and they exist for her good.

- No gift of the Holy Spirit is to be lived or exercised if it is not within the maternal womb of the Church. For this reason, Pentecost happened at the Cenacle (the room of the Last Supper, where the Eucharist, the priesthood and the pastors came to be). This is an ecclesial womb, in which the Mother of the Church with her maternal heart was united with the visible Head of the Church, the Petrine heart. With this action, the Holy Spirit indicated that the Church is a family – Mother, Head and body – in which the Holy Spirit gives life through His power throughout history, engendering with His “wind” many different charisms. In short, the Marian and Petrine principles were necessarily present at Pentecost.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in a document on Ecclesial Movements, described with great exactness the difficulties of the beginning, stating, “These Movements, effectively so, bore the illness of the first stage. They were given the possibility of embracing the action of the Holy Spirit who, nonetheless, acts through men who are not freed immediately from their weaknesses” (cf. The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements, 1998). He goes on to describe some of these weaknesses:

- A tendency towards exclusivity, not seeing the movement as a part of a whole. This made difficult their integration into the local churches.

- The belief, even conviction, that the local church had to elevate itself to its model or level and not vice versa. From this arose frictions for which both parties were responsible.

It became necessary to reflect on how these two realities – the new ecclesial birth originating from new situations and the pre-existing structures of ecclesial life, namely, parishes and the dioceses – could relate in an adequate manner. There exists a fundamental manner of ecclesial life in which the continuity of the historical order of the Church is expressed. As well, there are always new irruptions of the Holy Spirit that renew and bring to life the structures of the Church. However, these renewals are almost never immune to sufferings and friction. Therefore, we are not free from the obligation of clarifying how to integrate with continuity what is already established and what has just come forth as something new. The shadows at the beginning are a fruit of immaturity and bewilderment in the face of something new. They are shadows that, as a whole, can be overcome, and they are never stronger than the rays of light that are transmitted through these works of God.

Paul VI who saw the need to prolong the wonder of Pentecost in this moment of history also said, “So therefore, how is this spiritual renewal not going to be a gift to the Church and to the world? And how can we not adopt all the measures necessary so that it will continue to be so? This spiritual renewal must come from a solid base of ecclesial communion, of communion of spirits and of purpose with the Church and of an absolute fidelity to the doctrine of faith. Here he expresses the means through which the Renewal will accomplish its end.

Ecclesial Maturity

These two means, communion with the Church and fidelity to its doctrine, that were presented in such a clear manner by Paul VI to the Charismatic Renewal are the clear way for this Movement to live and advance with ecclesial maturity.

Servant of God John Paul II affirmed this on May 30th, 1998 in his meeting with ecclesial movements and new communities: “There is so much need today for mature Christian personalities, conscious of their baptismal identity, of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world! There is great need for living Christian communities! And here are the movements and the new ecclesial communities: they are the response, given by the Holy Spirit, to this critical challenge at the end of the millennium. You are this providential response” (no.7).

Furthermore, he said, “Today a new stage is unfolding before you: that of ecclesial maturity” (n.6). The Charismatic communities are also called today to take this step, and I am sure that the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services will be able to play an important role towards the maturation of ecclesial consciousness in the diverse charismatic Catholic communities all over the world. What John Paul II said at that moment in St. Peter’s, I repeat now for all of you congregated here in Rimini: “The Church expects from you the ‘mature’ fruits of communion and commitment” (ibid).

What is ecclesial maturity?

Msgr. Stanislaw Rylko (president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity) explains to us that ecclesial maturity means:

- A clear consciousness of the vocation in the Church as an ecclesial movement. This means that one must have clarity as to one’s identity and mission.

- Having love for the Church, the Pope and the bishops. It means feeling with the Church.

- Being faithful to the Magisterium of the Church.

- Having a passion for mission and evangelization. Strong proclamation is an urgent need, but it necessarily must be accompanied by a profound and solid Christian formation.

- Having fidelity to one's own charism, living it profoundly and not superficially, and courageously and authentically communicating it to others.

- Possessing a profound sense of ecclesial communion, including communion with other Movements and communities. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux spoke on this: "I admire all of them; I belong to one of them by observance, but to all of them through charity. We need one another; the spiritual good that I do not have or possess, I receive from the others." This appreciation for all gifts and movements is an essential component of ecclesial maturity because in each of them, I see the same active principal: the Holy Spirit.

Being schools of communion

John Paul II encouraged the Charismatic Renewal to be "living signs of hope, a light of the Good News of Christ for all men and women of our times" (cf. no.2. Message at the 8th International Meeting of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships, June 1, 1998). This requires, he added, us to be "authentic witnesses," to "maintain a close link with the Bishops and the Roman Pontiff," and hold to the truth the world today so needs (cf. ibid, no.3). Charismatic communities, concluded the Pope, have a great challenge that the new millennium presents to the Church: to be the home and the school of communion.

In this eloquent gesture, John Paul II chose Pentecost 1998, during a year dedicated to the Holy Spirit, to congregate all of the ecclesial movements, thereby manifesting in a fundamental manner the action of the Holy Spirit. By doing this, he wanted to strengthen – in a great Cenacle, centered around the Eucharist – communion with Peter, who should be, as successor of the Apostle, cared for and supported. He desired the Movements to give a common testimony before the Church and the world. This congress was promoted officially by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. This Council formally invited a representative of the Charismatic Renewal to present the Holy Father, in the name of all the movements, vows of fidelity to His Holiness and the Church.

Where is the Renewal heading?

I do not know; I can only give my humble perception. How do I see the Charismatic Renewal in my own limited experience? During the Easter Vigil I imagined a furnace that burned with great flames where we all came to pray; from there we all entered into the Church. Then the Pascal Candle was lit with the fire from this furnace and after each one of our candles was lit. The Church was dark because there was no light, but it was illuminated with the fire from each one of these candles.

This is how I see the Charismatic Renewal: as a furnace in the heart of the Church, from which many – groups, movements, apostolates – receive the fire that ignites their candles. With this fire they ignite the Church. The Charismatic Renewal, according to my poor understanding, will be a furnace in which many will be ignited and then will go out to serve the Church where she is most in need. For the Lord told us, "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!" (Lk 12,49). The mission of the Charismatic Renewal is to ignite the fire, to enlarge it, and to give it away so that each candle can light up that corner where the Church needs it.

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