

DOCUMENTATION

Catholic Bishops' Conference Statement on the Charismatic Renewal in Papua New Guinea

This statement was drafted by Bishops Ray Kalisz (Wewak) and Hermann Raich (Wabag), and it was adopted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference at its May, 1985, meeting.

Pope John Paul asked 650 leaders of charismatic communities from 108 countries at a special audience that "all their spiritual efforts be towards a personal encounter of each individual with Christ, in the community of the church". The aim of the conference of these delegates was "to integrate the sacramental and charismatic dimensions of Catholic spirituality".

This statement, along with Pope Paul's description of the movement for renewal in the Spirit as "a chance for the church and for the world", is to be the fundamental guideline given by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands for Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Papua New Guinea.

Thereby, the Conference gives its approval to the charismatic movement as one of the authentic movements for spiritual renewal of the church taking place in Papua New Guinea. There seems to be no doubt that there is an outpouring of the Spirit upon the Catholic church in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, expressed by an upsurge of interest in parish bible groups, Legion of Mary, lay ministries, and responsibilities in the church, as well as movements going on in liturgy, catechesis, etc., for which we thank God.

The aim of the Charismatic Renewal (CCR) is to help the faithful to experience more sincerely and intensively the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, which they have already received through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. However, a cautionary note is implied in Pope John Paul's statement, quoted above, that this renewal is to be made "in the

community of the church” – not independent of, or even worse, outside of, the church. The CBC of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands stresses this aspect, or characteristic, which must always be present in the CCR. Experience has shown that, when not properly guided, the CCR, because of its admitted emotional dimension, tends to withdraw itself from traditional teaching and lawful authority. On the other hand, experience has also shown that, under sound leadership, it (CCR) has been a powerful force for renewal in a deepening of faith, prayer life, love for the Word of God, return to a meaningful reception of the sacraments, and participation in the sacrifice of the mass.

As Vatican Council II states, “the church, being a pilgrim church, continually renews itself”. Hence, the CCR is by no means the only authentic movement of renewal in the church today, yet it is no doubt a powerful spiritual force of renewal, but, as is the case with all renewals, it needs ecclesial approval and guidance, as well as authentic Catholic teaching. For the most part, this can be done only within the parish and with the pastor, whether or not he himself is charismatic, either personally, or through others, providing this guidance and spiritual nourishment.

We feel that it would be helpful at this point to enumerate the positive results, as well as some negative aspects, that are often experienced in the CCR.

Some positive results:

- Usually people are attracted to know God deeper through the Word of God in Holy Scripture.
- People are strengthened to free themselves from all sorts of attachments, for instance, from slavery to passions, from revenge, hatred, envy, from addiction to gambling, alcohol, and drugs.
- People become more sensitive to the suffering of others, willingly serve, and develop deeper faith, and stronger hope
- The spirit of fellowship becomes deeper among the members of the group, as well as with people outside the group.

- Priests and the religious feel urged to live their priesthood and religious life more intensively.
- In families, the relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, show signs of mutual understanding and love.
- Many people become active in spreading the faith. They are conscious that proclaiming the faith is not only the task of priests, but also the task of all believers.

Because of these positive elements, pastors and leaders of the faithful should not reject charismatic renewal, a priori, on account of prejudice.

Some negative aspects:

- Some members of the CCR feel that now, for the first time, they have received the Holy Spirit, thus belittling the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of baptism, penance, confirmation, etc., and that they now “possess” Him and His gifts, and they tend to look down with a certain contempt on those who have not joined their group. They fail to realise that the Holy Spirit works in other ways in the lives of other people.
- The atmosphere during charismatic prayer meetings sometimes is not healthy, and too great a stress is put on feelings, as if those who attend are to be brought to a certain exaggerated experience. At times, it is forgotten that a charismatic gift is given for building up the faithful, and not for personal satisfaction. It is an unhealthy sign if members of the charismatic movement feel that there is no longer any need to attend services (mass) in church together with others, nor a need for the hierarchical structure of the church. Convincing proof of the presence of the Spirit does not lie in our feelings, but, above all, in our deeds, and our daily way of life.
- Sometimes people who are involved in the CCR tend to give a fundamentalist interpretation to holy scripture. This means

that they take the text of holy scripture literally, and that they are of the opinion that, in holy scripture, a direct answer can be found for every sort of problem.

- Likewise, there is a tendency to think that each one can interpret the meaning of every text of scripture for themselves, and that there is no need for the official teaching and interpretation of the church, as though they alone possessed the Spirit, and the church, to whom the Spirit was promised, did not.
- Some think that, because they have received some gifts or charisms of the Holy Spirit, they are automatically saints, and far advanced in spirituality, and thus have the right to speak authoritatively for the church. They fail to realise that what makes them holy is how they live their lives in faith, not what charisms they have received.

SOME HINTS

The charismatic renewal should be integrated into the life and activity of the local church, for the unity of the faithful is the most important fruit of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:12-14). Through this integration into the life and activity of the faithful of the local church (parish, outstation, neighbourhood-community), the danger can be avoided that the renewal becomes too spiritualistic and not realistic enough. The service of the people to society is a very important testimony to the church. Participation in the life and endeavours of the parish is a sign of genuineness and of the purity of the charismatic renewal.

The leaders of the charismatic renewal, who work with the permission of the local bishop, must be conscious that the situation of the faithful is not everywhere the same. A majority of the Catholics in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are still very young. Attention has also to be given to the fact that many of the faithful only recently rejected magical charisms in their beliefs. Too great a stress on the special charisms, gravely endangers the growth of faith of the believers, for magical religious belief can come back. Since the situation of the faithful varies from place to place, it is, therefore, within the competence of the

local bishop to evaluate whether the charismatic renewal can be approved, or not, within his diocese.

If the charismatic renewal is given approval with a diocese, pastoral care should be provided, so that the movement can develop well. In this development, the whole sacramental and liturgical life should be integrated. This life should inspire their prayer meetings, and their lives. Not only this, the whole tradition of the church, all along the centuries, should be studied and integrated as well, e.g., the Veneration of the Cross, the Stations of the Cross, the Veneration of Our Lady, the Rosary, the Veneration of the Saints.

Charismatics should remember the giver of the gifts, who is the Gift, the Holy Spirit Himself, and that the greatest gifts are faith, hope, and love.

The expression “baptism in the Spirit” often causes a false understanding among the faithful, and a belittling of the sacrament of baptism. The meaning of “baptism in the Spirit” should be explained – and, in general, other descriptive phrases used, e.g., “outpouring of the Spirit”.

Charismatics should recognise other valid movements of renewal in the church, and not try to force their movement on others. In the early church, the charismatic church of Corinth was quite different from the church in Galatia, but both were faithful to the teachings of Christ.

Charismatics, and others, should do nothing to destroy the unity of the church – something for which Christ prayed as a sign of His presence.

At the present time, there is a great amount of anti-Catholic activity among the smaller sects, some of which are Pentecostal. The advice to the faithful is not to join these groups in their prayer meetings, where the sects tend to alienate Catholic charismatics from the church by their constant preaching of anti-Catholic doctrine. This can become a form of brain-washing, which is very harmful to the faithful.

CLOSING WORDS

To complete our instructions, we wish to remind you, brothers and sisters, of the teachings of our mother church, which were given to us by the Second Vatican Council.

“The same Holy Spirit sanctifies the faithful of God, guides them and adorns them with virtues, not only through the sacraments, and through service, but He also gives to everyone gifts according to His will (1 Cor 12:11). He also bestows special gifts to the faithful belonging to various groups. These gifts enable them to carry out various tasks and duties, which are of benefit to the renewal, and further building up, of the church, according to the principle: “To everyone the Holy Spirit is given for the good of all” (1 Cor 12:7). These charisms, the great and the extraordinary ones, as well as those that are given in a more ordinary way, but more widely, must be received with thanks and consoling joy, for they are very appropriate and useful for the needs of the church. But the extraordinary gifts should not be sought after in an exaggerated way; nor should we, on account of these gifts, put excessive hopes on the results of apostolic endeavour. It is the right of the leaders of the church to judge their authenticity and their orderly use. It is within their special competence not to extinguish the Spirit, but to test everything and to keep what is good.” (See 1 Thess 5:12 and 19:21.)