

# IGNITE



in us the fire of your love

Volume 16, Number 4

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## The Prophetic role of the Charismatic Renewal

by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM

*In September, 1999, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, who serves as preacher to the papal household, addressed a gathering of priests sponsored by the Italian National Service Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. In his talks, Fr. Cantalamessa addressed several concerns facing the Renewal as it moves into the Third Millennium. The following article is excerpted from that talk.*

I would like to turn our attention to certain shadowy areas that give rise, it seems to me, to concerns about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, or, if you prefer, to certain dangers we ought to address.

### The Charismatic Renewal is for the Whole Church

There are countries where the church is strongly polarized. On the one side are those who have come to be variously defined as liberals, progressives or innovators; on the other side are the traditionalists or conservatives. The word "liberal" in the English-speaking world - and especially in the United States - has a meaning that is a little different from the meaning it has elsewhere. It signifies those who are more open to novelty. Among them there are some whose positions are frankly unacceptable and extreme. But there are also those who simply identify with Vatican II, which they would like to see implemented a little more courageously in the matter of pluralism, inter-cultural dialogue and the questions of decentralization.

On the opposite side, in reaction

to things that are seen as too innovative and secularized, a current has developed that is strongly attached to the theology and practices of the past. Here too there is a whole spectrum, ranging from well-known extremists to people who are perfectly balanced and full of zeal and love for Christ and the Church. Within reasonable limits this kind of tension is not only legitimate but necessary, since no one person, standing alone, can realize by himself the demands of fidelity and of progress in equal measure.

What is the danger as far as we are concerned? That the Charismatic Renewal, which came into being for the renewal of the whole church, should end up by becoming identified purely and simply with one segment of the church - the more conservative one. Reading religious publications from various countries, it is clear to me that some of them see the new ecclesial movements, including the Renewal, as conservative forces, if not as downright reactionary.

This does serious harm. The Charismatic Renewal is a gift for the whole church, not for just a particular part, and so it must remain. Indeed, in its early days, like every prophetic movement, it was seen as a great sign of newness and openness, a forward thrust on various fronts, the ecumenical outreach included. As such, it was welcomed by the Catholic Church hierarchy, and it has no need to change



## An Evaluation of the Charismatic Renewal

The discernment of the Church is that those involved in the Charismatic Renewal are seen to have:

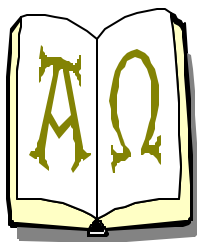
- ◆ A greater awareness of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit
- ◆ A deeper commitment to Jesus Christ
- ◆ A desire to live the Christian calling more fully
- ◆ An appreciation and acceptance of the charismatic gifts
- ◆ An increasing desire to read the Scriptures
- ◆ Love of the Eucharist
- ◆ A commitment to prayer
- ◆ A thirst for personal holiness
- ◆ New forms of community life
- ◆ A commitment to apostolic activity
- ◆ A willingness to witness to their faith and to evangelize
- ◆ A love for one another
- ◆ A faithfulness to the Church
- ◆ A desire to serve the local church, to bloom where they have been planted.

More could be included, but this is a very encouraging list. The Church has seen the considerable fruit which has grown in the last thirty-four years, and is saying to us that the call of the Charismatic Renewal is to produce this sort of fruit in the lives of individuals and in the local church. So how are we doing?

*Charles Whitehead*

its appearance to make itself acceptable. Cardinal Suenens, who was for years its principal sponsor and ecclesiastical spokesman, was, during and after the Council, one of the most authoritative promoters of the need for *aggornamento* - giving contemporary impact to the practices and beliefs of the church.

It is with infinite sadness that I see that the Charismatic Renewal has ended up confined to one part of the church only, and regarded by the rest as something so alien that they feel fully justified in keeping well clear of it. Let me say again, the Charismatic Renewal was born to renew the whole church and not just one part of it. When I say the whole church, I mean, naturally, the church that positions itself firmly in the mainstream of orthodoxy and the magisterium; that is ready, if necessary - one one side or the other - to submit obediently to the appointed authority (the bishop or the pope as the case may be), but not before having borne prophetic witness to the goals that are close to its heart, according to the sound dialectic that has always been the Catholic Church's strength and the root of its capacity for self-renewal.



We need to look squarely at this situation and do what has to be done to prevent it becoming even more widespread, and to correct it where it has become established. This is not a matter of taking this or that stance, but of being faithful to the Spirit who has no fear of differences and who is always able, according to Irenaeus, "to create a beautiful symphony out of many voices" as he did on the day of Pentecost.

The Charismatic Renewal is for the "essentials" of the Christian life

The second danger is devotionism. Here, too, we need to remember how it all began. The Charismatic

Renewal was born with a powerful drive to return to the essentials of the Christian life: the Holy Spirit, the lordship of Christ, the word of God, the sacraments, the charisms, prayer, evangelization. This is the secret of its explosive power. It simply accentuates what should be common and "normal" for every baptized person.

Let us once again offer to the church this taste for what is essential. The basic work of the Spirit is his sanctifying activity (see 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2) by which he transforms human beings, giving them a new heart, not the heart of a slave but the heart of a child of God's family. Next comes his charismatic activity, by which he distributes a variety of gifts for the good of the community. This is what he did

*This is a matter of being faithful to the Spirit who has no fear of differences.*

at Pentecost: he transformed the apostles, making new men of them, then he had them speak in tongues and prophesy, and he gave them all the gifts they would need for their mission. In the Charismatic Renewal too, we need to respect this hierarchy; personal sanctification must come first, and only then, in second place, the experience of the charisms. The Holy Spirit does not set out merely to clean up the dress of his bride, the church. His first aim is above all to renew her heart.

Why do I think it necessary to mention all these things? I believe that the words of the letter to the Hebrews are addressed to us, too: "Remember the earlier days...be as confident now" (Heb. 10: 32, 35). The Charismatic Renewal, and Catholicism generally, runs the risk of again becoming overgrown and weighed down, after the Council's great effort to restore simplicity and essentiality in doctrine and practice. In many things - for example in the devotion to Mary - the Council sought to bring back to Catholic practice a

*Cont. on p. 3*

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## NEWS NOTE

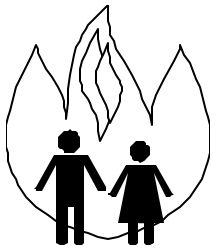


- ◆ **When the article about the picnic at the Focolare Center appeared in the last issue, no one dreamed that one of our members would be a victim in the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Frank Palumbo (firefighter), represented the Neo-Catechumenate on the Council of Ecclesial Movements. He leaves his wife Jean and their ten children. We ask your continued prayers for him and his family.**
- ◆ **Fr. James Conlan, former director of the Parish Mission Team, a fine priest and good friend of the Charismatic Renewal, died on Oct. 14. His great preaching and warm personality will be greatly missed.**
- ◆ **You will find a much longer feature article in this issue. Since there are not many major events coming up soon, there was room for it. Fr. Cantalamessa is well worth reading.**

SPC

sobriety that was lost in the in the course of the centuries, especially during the age of the Counter-Reformation.

Little by little we have seen this fruit of the Council being lost. There has been a return to an excessive insistence on what is optional. The Charismatic Renewal itself has become sucked into this whirlpool, to such an extent that in some places it has become identified merely by association with certain devotions, apparitions, individuals and particular messages. Certain of these things are in themselves quite legitimate, and a sign of the richness of the Catholic Church, but they need to be kept within their proper sphere and not imposed on all and sundry as a measure of the greater or lesser extent of their "catholicity."



This is not a question of taking position against any of these things. The point is whether the Charismatic Renewal ought to be characterized by this kind of thing, or by something else. We already have all that we need to become holy and to spread the Gospel. In this way, we would render our devotion to Mary more acceptable to other Christians, and we would be hastening the day when, instead of being an object of division, she would become a positive factor in the unity of Christians.

Our task as spiritual guides is to help our brothers and sisters to be open to the great mysteries of the faith and never to shut themselves up in any short-lived devotionism, which can never serve to re-evangelize the world.

To concentrate on essentials does not mean depriving the faithful of space for free expression, or personal preference, and reducing everything to a bland sameness. There is certainly room to cultivate one's personal devotion as well, but this needs to be kept within the ambit of what is personal. We must not confuse what is demanded of everyone with things that are to be left to individual choice.

**Courage and...let's get down to work!**

I would like to end on an encouraging note. There is a perception in some places that the Charismatic Renewal is at a standstill or shrinking, declining in enthusiasm and numbers. It is true, and it is normal in movements of this kind. They are not made to become institutions, but as the late Cardinal Suenens once said, to transmit an impulse, "a current of grace", and then if necessary to disappear, like an electric charge that is dispersed in a mass of matter. However, one thing remains the same today as in the early days of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and that is the power of the Holy Spirit. We see it achieve today, in those who come into contact with it for the first time, exactly the same effects as in the early days. Every time we allow him to act, every time we provide suitable occasions for his coming, where people gather as in the Upper Room with expectant faith, he does come down. I have had opportunity to see it again very recently. Every time it is a whole new world that opens up before the person who receives him.

Visible signs of the coming of the spirit are generally the rebirth of

courage, hope and joy. Even in the opinion of the public at large, the Charismatic Renewal is seen as a movement of joyful people, who clap or raise their hands, who seem transformed, with smiling, almost ecstatic faces. This is not a wrong perception. Joy is in fact one of the signs or fruits of the Spirit. I hope we will all cultivate the signs - courage, hope, joy - and avoid the dangers I have tried to bring to your attention. If my tone has been somewhat high-handed, please forgive me.

May the Holy Spirit help us carry the flame of Pentecost, undimmed, into the new millennium, so that it may continue to transform the lives of many

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**NOTE:** *This was a much longer article than we usually print, but it has a very important message and questions for all of us in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal - Are we still charismatic in our prayer meetings?*

*As I have visited prayer meetings, I have seen many that continue to manifest the gifts and offer an authentic charismatic experience. Often, such groups are faithful to giving a Life in the Spirit Seminar at least once a year.*

*In a few cases, there has been a marked lessening of the gifts and use of Scripture in favor of varied personal devotions, sometimes more than one, all in the context of what is called a charismatic prayer meeting.*

*It might be helpful to read and discuss this article and also the checklist on p. 1. What would Fr. Cantalamessa see if he attended your prayer meeting?*

SPC

**John Michael Talbot  
in Concert  
"A Wisdom Tour"  
Thursday, November 15, 2001  
at  
Shrine Church -O.L.of Pompeii  
25 Carmine St.  
(betw. Bleecker St. & 6th Ave.)  
Tickets - \$20.00  
Call: 212-744-1123  
or 718-548-8686  
Sponsored by O.L.of Peace PG**

**SAVE THE DATES!!  
National Charismatic  
Conference  
  
Sept. 13-15, 2002  
  
Location and themes  
to be announced**

**Save This Date!  
FRIDAY, FEB. 8, 2002  
A DAY OF PRAYER  
AND  
FASTING  
35th Anniversary of the CCR  
To intercede for a new  
evangelization in the  
new millennium  
Suggested by National Leaders**

## MINI-CALENDAR

Staten Island Conference, varied events, call 718-987-8175...

...Healing Mass, 3rd Tues., 8 p.m., St. Joseph Church, 40 Poplar Ave., Call Nanie, 948-2049

...Healing Mass, 3rd Tues., 8 p.m., O.L. Star of Sea, 5371 Amboy Rd., Call Rita, 984-4144

...Healing Mass, 3rd Sat., 8 p.m., O.L. of Mt. Carmel/St. Benedicta, 1235 Castleton Ave., Call Victor 494-1860

...Weekly Mass - Wednesdays -Lamb of God, Mt. Manresa, 9 P.M. (following 8 P.M. prayer meeting)

St. John the Baptist P.G., 210 W. 31 St., Healing Mass, third Tuesday, other events, call 212-213-9150

Manhattan...O.L. of Peace Prayer Community, 237 E. 62 St., NYC, 212-838-3189...call for current events

...Nov. 10-11, Life in the Spirit Seminar

...Nov. 15, 7 PM, John Michael Talbot at O.L. of Pompeii, 25 Carmine St. NYC, Tickets-\$20; call 212-744-1123,

...Dec. 7, Healing Mass for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, call for details

House of Peace, 718-547-3230...call to verify times, dates,

...First Saturday Healing Mass, 1:30 Pm, O.L. of Victory Academy Aud., 565 N. Bway, Dobbs Ferry

...Tuesdays at Noon, Healing Services at the House of Peace, 1291 Allerton Ave., Bronx

St. Elizabeth Seton House of Prayer, Scarsdale, 914-723-0533...

...Saturday Brunches - 9 AM - 12:30 PM - Themes from JP II's Letter on the New Millennium

Dec. 1, Sr. Pauline: "Living the Present with Gratitude-Growing in Praise"

Jan. 12, Sr. Nancy: "The Primacy of Grace and the Sacrament of Reconciliation"

...Thursdays, 9:30-2:15-Charismatic Prayer, Mass, Lunch, Scripture Sharing -except Nov. 22, Dec. 27

...Tuesdays, Charismatic evening prayer, 8 p.m. in the HOP Chapel (except Nov. 27, Dec. 25, Jan. 1)

...Mondays, Bible Study, 7:30-8:30, in the Chapel, led by Sr. Gloria

...New Year's Eve, from 8 PM until 1 AM, Liturgy at 11 PM, Fr. John Gordon, limited overnight accommodations

Northern Westchester/Putnam Vicariate Cluster - Mary Jane -914-737-4286 for general info

...Healing Mass, Nov. 15, St. James Church, 8 PM.

...Life in the Spirit Seminar, Sat., Nov. 17, 8:30 AM-5 PM, St. Patrick's Church, call Mary Jane, 914-737-4286

...Healing Mass, Dec. 13, 8 PM, St. John's, Mahopac, Fr. Pio Mandato

Rockland Cluster meets first Monday of the month, 8:15 p.m. Call 914-623-6503 for location

Ulster Healing Masses, Music at 7 pm, Mass at 7:30 pm, Call for dates/locations 914-626-7477...

*See the "Out & About" column of Catholic New York for more current information on events.*