

BISHOPS' PASTORAL LETTER ON THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

(BOMBAY, 1996)

Twenty four years ago a movement of the Holy Spirit called the Catholic Charismatic renewal first sprang up in Mumbai. From small beginnings it has spread throughout the archdiocese, and indeed to other parts of our country, and has produced many fruits of holiness and service in the Church. We wish to celebrate the beginning of this silver jubilee year of the CCR by giving encouragement to, and some pastoral guidelines for, this work of the Spirit of Jesus.

Endorsement of the Pope

We note with joy that two Popes have spoken encouragingly about the CCR. Pope Paul VI said, "How would it be possible that this spiritual renewal not be a chance for the Church and the world?" (19th May, 1975). Pope John Paul II has himself taken the initiative, both privately and publicly, to meet with leaders of the CCR. At a special audience for 523 leaders from 94 countries on 7th May, 1981 he said he made his own the words of St. Paul,, ?I give thanks to God every time I think of you' (Phil. 1:3). He went on to state that the words of Pope Paul VI regarding the CCR had been in fact confirmed all over the world:

"The Church has seen the fruits of your devotion to prayer in a deepened commitment to holiness of life, and love for the word of God. We have noted with particular joy the way in which leaders of the Renewal have more and more developed a broadened ecclesial vision, and we have likewise seen the signs of your generosity in sharing God's gifts with the unfortunate of this world..."

At a special audience for leaders of the CCR, the Pope said: "The vigor and fruitfulness of the CCR certainly attest to the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church in these years after the Second Vatican Council...Because of the Spirit, the Church preserves a continual youthful vitality, and the CCR is an eloquent manifestation of this vitality today, a bold statement of 'what the Spirit is saying to the Churches' as we approach the end of the Second Millennium" (15th May, 1987).

More recently, for the worldwide silver jubilee of CCR the Pope said, "As you celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the beginning of the CCR, I willingly join you in giving praise to God for the many fruits which it has borne in the life of the Church. The emergence of the CCR following the Second Vatican Council was a particular gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church" (14 March, 1992).

Something Special

We too in Bombay want to praise God for the twenty-five years of the existence of the CCR in our archdiocese. We have seen that there is something unique and special to this movement – Spirit-power, enthusiasm, motivation, inspiration – which enable people to experience in anew and deeper way the reality of their baptism and confirmation, and leads them to a stronger commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord, as well as to his body, the Church.

The CCR is able to meet some deep pastoral needs of our people, needs which do not seem to be adequately met in the usual church-setting:

1. The need to belong to a warm fellowship, and not be just anonymous individual parishioners lost in the crowd.
2. The need to participate in a personal, active, authentic and fulfilling way as disciples of the Lord and not just be passive or over-dependent on the clergy.
3. The need to experience the power of the sacraments and become holistically healed and fully alive, rather than just mechanically or superficially “be present” at church services.
4. The need to pray deeply, and to celebrate meaningfully, with all our feelings, including non-verbal and non-conceptual communication, and not just with dry prose.
5. The need to be gripped by the word of God, and to put it into practice in daily life in concrete ways.
6. The need to be immersed in God’s love in a personal way, and to experience Jesus’ forgiveness and salvation at the core of one’s being.
7. The need to be empowered to witness to Jesus, to work for a new creation, to be aglow with the Spirit.

Spiritual Warfare

Pope John XXIII prayed for a new Pentecost, and his prayer for the whole Church has been answered in part: the Spirit is at work, recreating the face of the earth. But the forces of evil are also at work; mammon is out to consume all with its lure of consumerism, a highly structured selfishness, systemic sin. The family as a unit is caught in a cross-fire. Marriage, as a human and sacred bond, is under great stress. Children are over-exposed to gory violence and illicit sex in the mass media. Women are treated like marketable commodities. The gift of life, babies, nature, trees, mother earth, the very air we breathe, are in great danger due to systemic evil.

Only a new prayer-power can save a humanity that is on the brink of disaster. Only a strong personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a solidarity with our brothers and sisters and a respect for mother earth, can enable humanity to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in ushering in God’s Kingdom. The weak, the wounded, the exploited and the victimized, are the *anawim* who must be given top priority in God’s Kingdom and empowered by the Spirit.

The grass-root Renewal

The CCR has emerged from the common people. Prayer groups led by lay persons, sometimes helped by priests, have grown in numbers, through intense retreat experiences and Life in the Spirit Seminars, many of which have been organized by the Mumbai service Team of CCR. Never before has there been such a spontaneous thirst for personal prayer, God’s word, prayer in common, and fellowship. The “baptism in the Spirit” or “outpouring of the Spirit”, inner healing, the charismatic gifts, and familiarity with Scripture have radically changed the quality of experience of many people of the Eucharist, the sacrament of Reconciliation, partnership in marriage, the power of priesthood, and youth activities. This is not just some renewal on paper, it is a new, palpable, people happening. The same Spirit is at work also in the small Communities that are mushrooming.

Pastoral Support

“Though the CCR has influenced many bishops, priests and religious personally, it has contributed in an even more profound way to the realization of the role of the laity in the

mission of the Church. From its beginnings on university campuses., to the formation of thousands of parish prayer groups, it has been largely led, taught, discerned and participated in by lay people. In a way not known in recent history, lay men and women are engaged in evangelization and the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus, in programmes of spiritual formation and spiritual direction...

“The CCR is clearly in and for the Church, not alongside the Church. It has repeatedly shown its commitment to the Church, asking the bishops and the Pope, for pastoral guidance, and supporting them by their prayers” (Pastoral Statement on the CCR of the U.S. Bishops’ Conference, 1984).

The Pope himself said the leaders of the CCR “Even when bishops do not share with you the forms of prayer which you have found so enriching they will take to heart your desire for spiritual renewal for yourselves and for the Church and they will offer you the sure guidance which is the task allotted to them. Many bishop throughout the world, both individually and in statements of their Episcopal Conferences, have given encouragement and direction to the CCR- and at times a helpful word of caution – and have assisted the Christian Community at large to understand better its place in the Church...” (7 May, 1981).

There is also the urgent need for priests to play an active and sympathetic role, as pointed out by the Pope: “The priest has a unique and indispensable role to play in and for the CCR, as well as for the whole Christian community. His mission is not in opposition to or parallel to the legitimate role of the laity...But the priest cannot exercise his service on behalf of the Renewal unless and until he adopts a welcoming attitude towards it” (Ibid).

Keeping in mind the above, we too in the Archdiocese of Bombay, which has been blessed with over 100 prayer groups served by the Mumbai Service Team (which includes representatives of the Tamil, Konkani, Marathi, and Malayalam Service Teams), now wish to offer the following pastoral suggestions and guidelines.

Practical Guidelines

A. Things to avoid:

- An over-emphasis on physical healings, signs and wonders, sensationalism and emotionalism;
- Seeing evil spirits or demons everywhere;
- Over-insistence on “tongues” and controversial prayer forms;
- Elitism or a “holier-than-thou” mentality, labeling people as “not Spirit-filled” and so on;
- Fundamentalism or a “bible-only” attitude;
- Disrespect for people of other religions, and “ghettoism”

B. Things to foster:

- A full integration into the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church and loyal adherence to Catholic teaching;
- Family renewal through family prayer, children’s ministry, retreats for couple;
- Time-management in order to put priorities in order, balancing the time spent in prayer meetings, parish service, small communities, earning one’s daily bread, and family commitments;

- Social action, to bring about a just society, joining hands with secular groups and Community Centers that are working for the most marginalized: dalits, laborers, women, children;
- Dialogue with people of other faiths, discovering all that is good and beautiful in their cultures;
- The five goals of the archdiocesan pastoral plan, working towards a communitarian church, a participative church, adult faith formation, integration of liturgy with life, and enculturation.

Conclusion

Our archdiocese has seen many fruits of the CCR. Its songs have enriched our liturgy. Those most active in parish activities are very often people who are or have been involved in CCR. We take this opportunity to thank the priests, religious, and lay leaders who have faithfully served the CCR and helped it with their encouragement and guidance. We call anew upon our priests, and more lay leaders, to help integrating the CCR into the mainstream of parish life.- Following the lead given by the Pope, we commend the CCR to the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary. May her example and prayers help us all to live in ever more perfect discipleship of her Son, Jesus our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of the Father, Amen.

Cardinal Simon Pimenta

Bishop Ferdinand Fonseca

Bishop Bosco Penha

Bishop Thomas Dabre