

STATEMENT ON THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL  
ISSUED BY THE BISHOPS OF  
THE ANTILLES EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE  
AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING,  
BELIZE, C.A, NOVEMBER 1976

## INTRODUCTION

For several years now we, the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, have followed with interest, joy and pastoral solicitude the rise and growth of many new Movements in the Church in our region as well as in the whole world, such as: Cursillos, Movement for a Better World, Marriage Encounter and directed retreats; the Christian Family Movement; various types of Prayer Groups and new forms of Christian Community such as Opus Dei, Focolarini, Madonna House Apostolate, etc.

All of these lay great stress on prayer, both communal and personal. This gift of God, a spirit of prayer, is a vital, constitutive element of the life of the Church, and is therefore, essential to her authentic renewal which the Holy Spirit is bringing about in our days.

We recognise in these Movements and forms of Christian Community manifestations of the Holy Spirit's active presence within the Church. They help the people of God in their thirst for holiness, in their personal commitment to Jesus the Lord, in their living his gospel and carrying out the apostolate of the Church amid the challenges presented to her in the world of today.

We, the Bishops, are glad about these manifestations of the Spirit and wish to encourage our faithful to be open to them and to participate as the Spirit leads them.

The Second Vatican Council teaches: It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:1-11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit' (1 Cor. 12:7).<sup>1</sup>

## THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

We wish here to address ourselves more particularly to one of the forms of renewal which is rapidly growing in our region. We refer to what is commonly called "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal".

This form of renewal consists mainly of Prayer Groups that meet usually once a week to pray in a spontaneous manner, often for a few hours at a time. Their prayer is mostly praise of God, spoken or in song, so much so that "Praise God!" or "Praise the Lord!" is constantly on their lips, and is for them not just a slogan, but is ever more becoming a *Way of Life*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium* No.12

This Prayer Movement is usually called the *Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, not because its members claim an exclusive possession of the charisms (special gifts of the Holy Spirit), but because this Movement seeks to renew the Church through a greater faith in the action of the Holy Spirit. His guidance is constantly sought: he is expected to manifest his active presence in the faithful through his gifts or charisms.

#### FRUITS OF THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

There is strong reason to believe that this Renewal is very beneficial for those involved and for the Church.

From what we have learnt to be life experience of many in this form of Renewal we present the following aspects, which we recognise as some of its significant fruits.

This Renewal has been the instrument of many sincere and profound conversions of persons who had abandoned the practices of the Christian life and fallen into serious sin and vice, such conversions resulting in a return to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, to a life of personal prayer and dedication to the apostolate.

Those truly involved in this Renewal are acquiring:

- a) *A new attitude to worship*: a spontaneous overflow of love and joy in the Lord, manifested especially in their participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, in their desire to have fruitful recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and in seeking God through personal prayer;
- b) *a new love of the Word of God* in the Scriptures and an intense desire to have it explained to them; a desire to 'live in Christ' and to have the Word transform them into his image; a desire to know God's will for their lives;
- c) an appreciation of the *value of Christian asceticism*, e.g., the practice of fasting, undertaken not as an obligation imposed from without, but through an inner need to be more open to the Lord and his Spirit and to share the experience of privation with their poor and hungry brethren in the world;
- d) an awareness of the *Church as People of God*, consequently a new appreciation of the ministerial priesthood and of their own sharing in the priesthood of Christ. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." ( 1 Pet. 2:9).
- e) an understanding of what it means to have *an authentic local Church*. There is a growing sense of their responsibility for meeting every need of Church life in our region: the priesthood, religious communities, the tasks of catechetics and teaching, of preaching and evangelisation and all other forms of the Apostolate;
- f) a new awareness of the *Church as community*: people who love and care for one another and deeply share one another's life. There seems to be a

real breaking down of the old barriers, racial, social, denominational and even territorial, that used to keep them apart: the charity of Christ, the conviction that they share his life and his Spirit and that this sharing is all-important, unites them and transcends their differences. From this also there results a positive acceptance of their colour, a healing of the wounds left by a long history of slavery and oppression; an acceptance of themselves and of their place in God's plan. "You are, all of you, sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. All baptised in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:26-28). "You have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its creator; and in that image there is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised or the uncircumcised, or between barbarian and Scythian, slave and free men. There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything." (Col. 3: 10- 11).

- g) a genuine desire and a sense of need to be in *close contact with "those who have charge over the Church*, so that they should judge the genuineness and proper use of the spiritual gifts, and to whose office it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good."<sup>2</sup>

We cannot, therefore, but rejoice and thank God for the spread of this Renewal.

#### PASTORAL GUIDELINES

Aware of our responsibility as Pastors and following the example of several Episcopal Conferences, e.g. that of the U.S.A., where this Renewal began in 1967, that of Canada and, in fact, of our Holy Father Pope Paul VI (Rome Conference, May 1975) we wish to give it public encouragement and assure it of our approval.

We think the time has come to state our hopes for the role of the Charismatic Movement in the renewal of the Church in our region, and to issue some guidelines that will foster its harmonious development and will prevent any deviation or error.

#### (a) PREVIOUS STATEMENTS

During our 1974 Meeting in Georgetown, Guyana, we adopted the following resolution, at the suggestion of the Caucus of Priests:

"Individuals and groups should be encouraged to choose the forms of prayer which unite them with God. The rapidly growing Catholic Charismatic Movement is singled out for special mention. This Movement is good and deserves the support of priests. As far as possible they should share in that form of prayer life and, if needed, give guidance. It is important, however, that prayer group leaders be properly trained."

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<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium* No. 12

We commend those priests who have given this support, have shared in the Prayer Meetings and have generously given their talents, time and energy to provide guidance, and are training Prayer Group Leaders in Christian doctrine and a proper understanding of the Scriptures.

Before the meeting of the Antilles Episcopal Conference of November 1975 in Martinique, we received a letter from the Lay Leaders of this Renewal who had represented the Caribbean countries at the 1975 International Leaders' Conference in Rome, 11th — 18th May. In this letter they gave us details of the growth and development of this Renewal in our region and requested our help to meet its needs.

We quote the following from our reply to this letter: “We have, in this meeting of Bishops (Martinique, November 1975), dealt with the need for the establishment of Spirit inspired basic communities within the larger parish communities, and we are convinced that the Charismatic Prayer Group is very effective in forming this needed type of basis community.

We are particularly anxious that our people be formed in the Word through properly directed study and meditative reading of Sacred Scripture; we desire every member to seek a greater understanding of the nature of the Church, to participate more deeply in its prayer life and aspire to become more intimately involved in its mission. To this end, we beg you, the leaders of Charismatic Renewal in our region, to persevere in this divinely inspired work which is directly aimed at providing these present needs in the Church.”

(b) NEED FOR SOUND TEACHING

We appeal now to all our priests to be open to this form of Renewal, to get personally acquainted with it, and to seek to co-operate with the Leaders so that the full potential of the Renewal may be of benefit to every diocese and, in fact, to each parish, of our Conference. There is great need for teaching in this Renewal and for priests to be more involved, so that the laity can be encouraged and properly taught. Their minds and hearts are open to receive sound teaching, and their understanding heightened, as those who have already undertaken this task can testify. Such teaching would obviate the danger of fundamentalism, to which the sometimes indiscriminate use of the Holy Scriptures exposes members of this Renewal. It would help the faithful involved better to understand and appreciate their identity as Catholics and counteract the pressures from classical Pentecostalism to which they may be exposed in meetings that are open, to members of other Christian Churches, and also through reading the copious literature coming from these sources. We strongly advise that in the teaching given there be promoted a better acquaintance with the rich sources of sound spirituality found in the traditions of our Church.

(c) NEED FOR CAUTION

There are dangers to be avoided.

- i) The principal of these is that of the Charismatic Renewal becoming a “*Church-within-the-Church*” and possibly engendering division in the

parish and diocese. This danger may easily arise where the group turns in upon itself, is inattentive to other needs of their parish, or meets with only discouragement and criticism from their pastor. The latter has a duty before God earnestly and with prayer to discern the fruits of any such movement within his parish. The Leaders of the Prayer Group, on the other hand, are reminded that they belong to the parish community and they should seek to co-operate with the pastor in building it up.

- ii) While the *gift of tongues* can be a true, genuine prayer gift, to which we must be open, it must not be presented as an essential sign of the ‘breakthrough’ or ‘release’ of the Holy Spirit, neither must its importance be exaggerated.
- iii) Recognising that the *gift of prophecy* continues in the Church of today, we must remember the danger of false prophecy. True prophecy must be in keeping with the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church, to whose teaching authority it belongs to pronounce on its authenticity.
- (iv) The ‘*laying of hands*’ on a person who seeks the prayer of his brothers and sisters in the Lord can be a beautiful expression of their loving concern and solidarity with this person; but we wish to warn our faithful against the erroneous belief that this action is in any way an efficacious substitute for the sacraments of the Church.
- (v) A fundamental and indispensable virtue of the Christian life is *humility*. “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.” (Mat. 12:29). Such Christ-like humility would exclude any suggestion that those involved in this Renewal are better Christians than others who are not so involved. In other words, any impression of ‘elitism’ is to be avoided.
- (vi) We acknowledge the benefits that can be derived from *praying together with Christians of other traditions*. The experience of the great gift we share with them: the life of Christ and his Spirit, makes us appreciate that just as they can learn from us, they in their turn can enrich our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. However, we wish to remind the faithful that they must strictly abide by the ruling of the Church on inter-communion, which normally permits Holy Communion only to those who are members of the Catholic Church.
- (vii) The Scriptures teach us that we “must love the Lord our God” not only with our mind but also with our heart, and they often tell us about God’s loving kindness in strongly emotive language. We feel, however, that we ought to caution the faithful that as human beings we should *control our emotions*; they must not lead us into exaggerations but rather be so directed as to enrich our spiritual lives.
- (viii) Another feature of the Charismatic Renewal, remarkable in our age, is the seriousness with which they take Our Lord’s teaching on the *activity of Satan and evil spirits*, and their readiness to understand many tragic

human situations in terms of diabolical interference and possession.

The Church has never ceased to teach that there are evil spirits and that they have a certain power over sinful man. Indeed, St. Peter exhorts us: “Be calm but vigilant, because your enemy the devil is prowling round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat.” (1 Pet. 5:8), and St. Paul warns us that “it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the Sovereignities and the Powers who originate the darkness in this world, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens.” (Ephes. 6:12). We have no reason to suppose that such powers have ceased to be active in the twentieth century. “The evil one led man astray into sin, but his power was broken by Christ’s death and resurrection.”<sup>3</sup> Power over evil spirits was given by Jesus not only to the twelve (Mk. 6:7; Mt. 10:1), but also to the seventy-two (Lk. 10:17), and at the end of St. Mark’s Gospel we are told that those who believe “in my name they will cast out devils” (Mk. 16:17). We wish to warn members of Prayer Groups, however, against too naive an approach. The activity of evil spirits in this world does not in any way rule out natural secondary causes, e.g. psychic disturbance, and there is no reason to attribute mental disorders, physical diseases, vices, breakdowns in human relationships and other misfortunes directly to the power of evil spirits. Discernment is necessary. Not infrequently much unnecessary anguish is caused by indiscriminate prayers for deliverance from evil spirits. Therefore those who feel called to the ministry of deliverance should exercise this only under the direction of persons of discernment and experience. We also remind them that for major exorcism the Church has a special rite and reserves its use to priests appointed for the purpose by the bishop.

- (ix) It is clear that in both the recognition of the charisms in individuals as well as their proper use, there is great need of *discernment*, the charism or gift to which all the other charisms are subject. It is therefore very important that the Prayer Groups pray for this gift for those who lead them, and that they seek the guidance of their pastors, especially their bishops, who through their very office as shepherds of the flock of Christ are endowed with this gift.
- (x) The indwelling of the Holy Spirit with his *sanctifying gifts* conferred in the Sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist), namely, Wisdom, Understanding, Right Judgement, Courage, Knowledge, Reverence, and Wonder-and-Awe in the presence of God, should be more highly appreciated and brought to life through prayer and teaching.

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<sup>3</sup> *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Art. 13, c.f. Art. 2.

Without these sanctifying gifts the other, charismatic, gifts could be dangerous. (See 1 Cor. 12). The Second Vatican Council teaches that “these charismatic gifts are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation since they are fitting and useful for the needs of the Church.” But the Council also warns us that “extraordinary [spectacular] gifts are not to be rashly, desired, nor is it from them that the fruits of apostolic labour are to be presumptuously expected.” (*Lumen Gentium* No.12).

In fact, the Apostle Paul in his First Letter to the Christians at Corinth, who had evidently been richly blessed with such gifts, addresses himself to the problems of pride, dissension, jealousy, divisive factions etc., to which precisely these gifts had given rise. He forcefully declares that we ought to “be ambitious for the higher gifts, and for a way that is better than any of them,” namely love, charity (1 Cor. 12:31 - 13:13). A church that is fully alive undoubtedly possesses all the gifts of the Spirit, people in this Renewal need to be taught to use them for the glory of God and the salvation of the world, but not for self-aggrandisement.

(d) OTHER WAYS OF SERVING THE CHURCH

We, the Bishops, suggest that the members of the Charismatic Renewal could serve the Church in their parishes

- i) by assisting their pastors in the implementation of No. 9 of our “Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation,” especially Para 3:<sup>4</sup> “We are all aware that there are many who are nominally members of our Catholic communities, but have never been truly converted to Christ. This is a constant concern for us and in our ministry we try in various ways to bring them to conversion by sermons, missions, visitations and other forms of personal contact. We often forget, however, that when such persons respond to the call of Christ, they still need a period of gradual initiation before they achieve their full status as living members of his body. “

“In those dioceses where adult baptism is very rare the Church still has a great need for a structure through which it can form and bring to a mature faith those who, although baptised in infancy and even confirmed, have only in adult life begun to turn to Christ and to respond to the demands of the Gospel. Even if these adults have not yet heard the message of the mystery of Christ, their circumstances differ from those of catechumens since they have already become members of the Church and children of God by baptism. Hence their conversion is based on the baptism they have already received and they must unfold its power. For the same reason as for catechumens the preparation of these adults requires a long time (introduction, No.21) for the faith given to them in baptism to grow and come to maturity, by the pastoral teaching given to them. Their Christian life should be strengthened by suitable discipline and the teaching given to

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<sup>4</sup> Liturgy Bulletin, Vol, 4, No. 5, June 1976

them by contact with the community of believers and by taking part in certain liturgical rites'.<sup>5</sup>

“In various parts of the region ‘Life in the Spirit’ Seminars, followed by a period of growth towards full commitment, which have been organised by Prayer Groups, have given us many examples of conversion among baptised Catholics. Their success should convince us of the need to set up structures that would do something similar for the whole Catholic community. We would, therefore, strongly encourage parishes, in territories where there is no need for an adult catechumenate in the proper sense, to implement a provision of R.C.I.A. Ch. 4.”

- ii) We would be glad to know that we could look to the members of the Charismatic Renewal to fulfil the very important function of providing a warm and authentic community welcome for all parents and guardians of infants to be baptised, especially for those who are on the margin of the Church (*Ibid.* Para 13b), as well as for Christians of other traditions who seek to be admitted to full communion with our Church, and those (non-Christians) who are being prepared for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.
- (iii) Regarding the problem of those who, as a result of a new sense of conversion, are inclined to seek re-baptism, we state unequivocally that baptism once received may not and cannot be repeated. As we have already said: the Holy Spirit with all his gifts, sanctifying and charismatic, is given in the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, whether received by infants or by adults, whether through immersion or effusion, though they may be manifest only at a later stage. For a pastoral approach to this problem we draw your attention to the above-mentioned Guidelines No. 10.
- (iv) Personal renewal must motivate us towards service of the community at parish and diocesan levels and also of the wider community of men. We urge upon all in this form of Renewal in our region to learn from the experience of other Prayer Groups how they can better serve the liberation and development of all their brothers and sisters. We therefore advise the Prayer Groups to study carefully our Pastoral Letter on “Justice and Peace in the Caribbean.”

At the same time we would do well to remember the words of our Holy Father Pope Paul VI in his recent Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelisation in the Modern World, No. 27: “Evangelisation will always contain — as the foundation, centre, and at the same time summit of its dynamism — a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy. And not an immanent salvation

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<sup>5</sup> R.C.I.A. 295-296



meeting material or even spiritual needs, restricted to the framework of temporal existence and completely identified with temporal desires, hopes, affairs and struggles, but a salvation which exceeds all these limits in order to reach fulfilment in a communion with the one and only divine Absolute; a transcendent and eschatological salvation, which indeed has its beginning in this life but which is fulfilled in eternity.”

#### CONCLUSION:

The Charismatic Renewal is open to everyone in the church, regardless of education and status. As in the Gospel, the blind, the sick and the lame are drawn by their own inner need to touch Jesus and to be healed in order to come to fullness of life. However, the faithful already within the Renewal must avoid exerting pressure by insisting on gestures and attitudes of worship that may bewilder those not familiar with some of its practices. While such gestures may be expressive and even beautiful, they are not essential.

And who can teach us how to live in the Spirit of Jesus better than the one who has already experienced the fullness of His life, Mary the Mother of God? We need to learn more and more how to yield our lives to the Holy Spirit, as Mary teaches us: “Be it done unto me according to Thy word.” (Luke 1:38). But to live in Christ also means to share Mary’s faith. Elizabeth recognised in her cousin this gift of Jesus: “Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.” (Luke 1:45). And finally, a Christian must find his heart and centre in a life of praise, the fruit of which is living in the joy of His presence, where love reflects all glory to God. “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.” (Luke 1:46). Yes, Mary is the incomparable exemplar of a Spirit-filled Christian. She gathers once again in the “Upper Room” those who wish to be true disciples of Jesus, her Son.

Finally, the Charismatic Renewal should be seen as one of God’s gifts to his Church — a leaven for renewing the Body of Christ through the power of his Spirit in every aspect and as a fulfilment of Pope John XXIII’s prayer for the success of the Ecumenical Council, “Renew Thy wonders in this our day as by a new Pentecost.” We hope that, like the Liturgical Movement, it will be integrated into the Church and bring about unity and healing. We earnestly pray that it will stimulate, through fervent worship and the beauty of Christian lives, the proclamation that “Jesus Christ is the Lord to the glory of God the Father!”

(Signed by)

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President of the Antilles Episcopal Conference

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