

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal: A Current of Grace for the whole Church **Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, ofmcap, Vatican, June 8th, 2019**

Content

PART ONE: “RENEWAL

What the New Life in the Spirit Consists in
A Current of Grace for the Whole Church

PART TWO: “CHARISMATIC”

The Rediscovery of Charisms by Vatican II

I begin with the conviction shared by all of us and often repeated by Pope Francis that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) is “a current of grace for the whole Church.” If the CCR is a current of grace for the whole Church, we have a duty to ourselves and to the Church to explain what this current of grace consists of and why it is intended for and necessary for the whole Church. In brief, we need to explain who we are and what we offer—or better, what God offers—to the Church through this current of grace. Until now we have not been—not could we have been—able to say clearly what the Charismatic Renewal is. It is necessary in fact to experience a way of life before being able to define it. This has always happened in the past whenever new forms of Christian life appeared. It is unfortunate when movements and religious orders begin with many rules and a detailed constitution established up front as a protocol to follow. Life, as it progresses, acquires features and makes its own rule, like a river that carves out its own bed as it moves forward.

We have to admit that until now we have given the Church ideas and portrayals of the Charismatic Renewal that have been different and at times contradictory. We only need to make brief enquiries of the people who live outside of it for us to become aware of the current confusion with regard to the identity of the Charismatic Renewal.

For some people it is movement of “enthusiasts,” no different than the “enthusiastic and enlightened” movements in the past, the Alleluia people with their hands raised who pray or sing in an incomprehensible language: in brief, an emotional and superficial phenomenon. I can say this with full knowledge of these facts because for quite a while I was among those who thought this way. For some people, the movement is identified with people who do healing prayer or exorcisms; for still others, it is a Protestant

and Pentecostal “infiltration” into the Catholic Church. At best, the Charismatic Renewal is seen as a movement whose members can be relied on to do many things in the parish but with which it is best not to get too deeply involved. As someone once said, people like the fruit of the renewal but not the tree.

After fifty years of existence and experience, and on the occasion of the inauguration of the new service organization CHARIS, perhaps the moment has come to attempt a reinterpretation of this movement and to define it, even if any definition cannot be definitive since its path is far from over.

I believe that the essence of this current of grace is providentially enclosed in its name, “Charismatic Renewal,” provided one understands the true significance of both these words. What I propose to do is to dedicate the first part of my speech to the noun “Renewal” and the second part to the adjective “Charismatic.”

PART ONE: “RENEWAL”

It is necessary to make some preliminary remarks for us to understand the relationship between the noun “Renewal” and the adjective “Charismatic” and what each represents. In the Bible we clearly see two modes in which the Spirit of God operates. There is the first mode that is called charismatic. This occurs when the Spirit of God comes upon some people in particular circumstances and confers on them gifts and an ability beyond a human capacity to accomplish the task God is expecting of them. [1]The characteristic of this mode of operation by the Spirit of God is that it is given to a person but not for that person’s sake—to make him or her more pleasing to God—but rather for the good of the community, for service. Some of the people who received these gifts in the Old Testament ended up leading lives that were anything but conformed to God’s will.

Only later, essentially after the exile, does the Bible begin to speak about a different mode of operation by the Spirit of God, a mode that will later be called the sanctifying action of the Spirit (see 2 Thess 2:13). The Spirit is defined as “holy” for the first time in Psalm 51: “Take not your holy Spirit from me” (v. 11). The

clearest testimony of this is the prophecy in Ezekiel 36:26-27:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

The innovation of this mode of acting by the Spirit is that it comes upon people and remains there, transforming them from within, giving them a new heart and a new ability to observe the law. Later, theology will call the first mode of the Spirit's action "*gratia gratis data*," a free gift, and call the second, "*gratia gratum faciens*," grace that makes one pleasing to God.

As we move from the Old to the New Testament, this dual kind of action of the Spirit becomes even clearer. We only need to read chapter 12 of the First Letter to the Corinthians that speaks of all types of charisms and then go on to the next chapter, chapter 13, that speaks of a unique gift, equal and necessary for all, which is love. This love is "God's love . . . poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5), the love, as defined by St. Thomas Aquinas, "with which God loves us and which makes us capable of loving him and the brethren."^[2]

The relationship between the sanctifying action of the Spirit and his charismatic action is seen by Paul as similar to the relationship between being and acting and to the relationship between unity and diversity in the Church. Sanctifying action concerns the Christian's *being*, the charisms concern *acting* because they are for service (see 1 Cor 12:7; 1 Pet 4:10); the first establishes the *unity* of the Church while the second establishes the *variety* of its functions. We can read Ephesians 4:4-13 on this point. There the apostle explains first what constitutes the being of a Christian and the unity of all believers: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith; he goes on to say, "grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (v. 7): apostles, evangelists, teachers, etc.

The apostle does not stop at highlighting the two modes of operation by the Spirit but affirms the absolute priority of the sanctifying action over the charismatic action. Acting depends on being (*agere sequitur esse*), not the reverse. Paul reviews the majority of

charisms—speaking in tongues, having the gift of prophecy, understanding all mysteries, distributing everything to the poor—and concludes that without love a charism is worthless for the one who exercises it, even if it benefits the people who receive it.

It is true that a charism is not given because of, or in view of, a person's holiness, but it is also true that a charism does not stay healthy and can actually become corrupt and end up causing harm if it is not grounded in personal holiness. To recall the priority of the Spirit's sanctifying action over his charismatic action is the specific contribution the Catholic Charismatic Renewal can bring to the Evangelical and Pentecostal movements, which had themselves among their roots the so-called "Holiness Movement."

All that I have said about the renewing and sanctifying action of the Spirit is enclosed in the noun "Renewal." Why precisely this word? The idea of newness goes along with the revelation of the Spirit's sanctifying action from beginning to end. Ezekiel had previously spoken about a "new spirit." John speaks about being "born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5). But above all St. Paul is the one who sees in this "newness" what it is that characterizes the whole "new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6). He defines the believer as "a new man" (Eph 2:15; 4:24) and the baptism as "the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

The thing to make clear right away is that this new life is the life brought by Christ. He is the one, in rising from the dead, who has given us the possibility, thanks to our baptism, of "walking in newness of life" (see Rom 6:4). It is thus a gift before being a duty, "something done" before being "something to do." On this point we need a Copernican revolution in the common mindset of believing Catholics (not a revolution in the official doctrine of the Church!), and this is one of the most important contributions the Charismatic Renewal can make—and has made in part—to the life of the Church. For centuries the emphasis was so much on morality, on duty, on what to do to gain eternal life, that it inverted the relationship and put duty before gift, making grace the effect instead of the cause of our good works.

The Charismatic Renewal, concretely the baptism in the Spirit, brought about in me this Copernican revolution that I was speaking

about, and because of that I am deeply convinced that it can bring about that revolution in the whole Church. And it is the revolution on which the possibility of re-evangelizing the post-Christian world depends. Faith blossoms in the context of the *kerygma* not in the context of the *didaché*, that is, not in the context of theology, apologetics, and morality. These things are necessary for the “formation” of faith and bring it to the perfection of charity, but they are not able to generate faith. Christianity, unlike every other religion, does not begin by telling people what they need to do to save themselves; it begins by telling them what God has done in Christ to save them. It is the religion of grace.

There is no danger that one can fall into “quietism” this way and forget the duty of acquiring virtue. Scripture and experience leave no way out on this point: the surest sign of the presence of the Spirit of Christ is not charisms but the “fruit of the Spirit.” The Charismatic Renewal needs instead to be on guard against another danger, the one for which St. Paul reproached the Galatians: “Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?” (Gal 3:3)—the return to the old legalism and moralism that would be the exact antithesis of what “renewal” refers to. There exists, of course, also the opposite danger of using “your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” (Gal 5:15), but that is more easily recognizable.

What the New Life in the Spirit Consists in

But it is time to get more concrete and see what the new life in the Spirit consists in, how it is manifested, and thus what genuine “renewal” is. We rely on St. Paul, and more precisely on his Letter to the Romans, because it is there that he sets forth its constitutive elements almost systematically.

A Life Lived according to the Law of the Spirit
The new life is first of all a life lived “by the law of the Spirit.”

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. (Rom 8:1-2)
We cannot understand what the phrase “law of the Spirit” means if we do not begin with the event of Pentecost. In the Old Testament, there were two basic interpretations for the feast of Pentecost. At the beginning, Pentecost was the

feast of harvest (the feast of weeks) (see Num 28:26ff) when people offered God their first fruits (see Ex 23:16; Deut 16:9ff). But later, and certainly by Jesus’ time, the feast had been enriched with a new meaning. It was the feast that recalled the giving of the law on Mount Sinai and the covenant established by God with his people—the feast, in a word, that commemorated the events described in Exodus 19-20. A text from the current Hebrew liturgy for Pentecost (*Shavuot*) says, “This day of the feast of weeks is the time of the giving of our Torah.”

It seems that St. Luke deliberately described the descent of the Holy Spirit with the signs that characterized the theophany at Sinai; he uses images, in fact, that recall the earthquake and the fire. The liturgy of the Church confirms this interpretation since it includes Exodus 19 in the readings for the Vigil of Pentecost.

What does this parallel approach tell us about our Pentecost? In other words, what does it mean that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Church on the very day in which Israel recalls the giving of the law and the covenant? St. Augustine already asked this question and gave the following answer. Fifty days after the sacrifice of the lamb in Egypt, the finger of God inscribed the laws of God on Mount Sinai on stone tablets, and here fifty days after the sacrifice of Christ, the true Lamb of God, again the finger of God, the Holy Spirit, wrote his law. But this time it was not on stone tablets but on the tablets of flesh of people’s hearts.[3]

This interpretation is itself based on Paul’s affirmation that defines the community of the new covenant as “a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:3). The prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel about the new covenant are suddenly illuminated. “This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts” (Jer 31:33). It is no longer on tablets of stone but on hearts; it is no longer an external law but an interior law.

How does this new law that is the Spirit function concretely, and in what sense can it be called a “law”? It functions through love! The new law is what Jesus calls “the new commandment” (Jn 13:34). The Spirit has written the new law on our hearts, infusing

love into them: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). This love, as St. Thomas explained to us, is the love with which God loves us and, at the same time, makes us able to love him in return and to love our neighbor. It is a new ability to love.

There are two ways a person can be induced to do, or not to do, a certain thing:

by *compulsion* or by *attraction*. The external law induces a person the first way, by compulsion and with the threat of punishment. Love induces him in the second way, by attraction. People are in fact attracted by what they love without having to be subjected to any external constraint. Christian life is lived by attraction, not by compulsion, by love, not by fear.

A Life of the Sons and Daughters of God

Secondly, the new life in the Spirit is the life of the sons and daughters of God. The apostle goes on to say,

All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom 8:14-16)

This is a central idea in the message of Jesus and the whole New Testament. Thanks to baptism that has grafted us onto Christ, we have become children in the Son. What new thing, then, can the Charismatic Renewal bring to this? Something very important, and that is the discovery and existential awareness of the fatherhood of God that has made more than one person melt into tears at the moment of the baptism of the Spirit. *Legally*, we are his children through baptism, but *experientially* we become his children thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit that is ongoing in our lives.

A filial sentiment is born. From being a *master*, God becomes a *father*. That is the moment in which a person wholeheartedly exclaims for the first time, "Abba, my Father!" This is one of the most frequent effects of the baptism of the Spirit. I remember an elderly lady from Milan, in receiving the baptism of the Spirit, who went around saying to everyone in her group, "I feel like a baby, I feel like a baby! I have discovered that God is my papa!" Experiencing God's fatherhood means experiencing his infinite love and mercy.

A Life under the Lordship of Christ

Finally, the new life is a life under the Lordship of Christ. In Romans the apostle writes,

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10:9) And again soon after in the same letter he says, None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (Rom 14:7-9)

This special awareness of Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit!" (1 Cor 12:3). The most evident gift I received on the occasion of my baptism in the Spirit was the discovery of the Lordship of Christ. Up to that point, I was a scholar of Christology; I taught courses and wrote books on ancient christological doctrines. The Spirit converted me from Christology to Christ. What emotion I had when I heard, in the stadium at Kansas City in July 1977, 40,000 believers from various denominations singing, "He is Lord, He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." For me, who was still an outside observer of the Charismatic Renewal, this song had cosmic resonances since it brought into play what is in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Why not repeat this experience, on an occasion like this, and proclaim the Lordship of Christ together in song. Let those who know it sing it in English...

What is special in the proclamation of Jesus as Lord that makes it so distinctive and decisive? It is that by proclaiming it one not only makes a profession of faith but also makes a *personal decision*. Whoever proclaims it is deciding the meaning of his or her life. It is like saying, "You are my Lord; I submit to you, and I freely recognize you as my savior, my head, my master, the one who has complete rights over me. I joyfully yield the reins of my life to you."

This luminous rediscovery of Jesus as Lord is perhaps the most wonderful grace in our time that God has granted to his Church through the Renewal. In the beginning, the proclamation of Jesus as Lord (*Kyrios*) was, for evangelization, what the ploughshare is to the plow, the blade

that first breaks up the ground and allows the plow to make a furrow in the soil.

Unfortunately, a change occurred concerning this word when we move from the Jewish sphere to the Hellenistic sphere. In the Jewish world the title *Adonai*, Lord, was enough in itself to proclaim Jesus' divinity. And in fact it is with that title that Peter proclaims Jesus Christ to the world on the day of Pentecost: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

When it came to preaching to the pagans, however, this title was no longer adequate. Starting with the Roman emperor, so many called themselves "Lord." The apostle notes it somberly: "Although there are many "gods" and many "lords," yet for us there is one Lord, Jesus Christ" (see 1 Cor 8:5-6). Already by the third century the title "Lord" was no longer understood in its kerygmatic sense: it was considered the proper title used by anyone still at the stage of being a "servant" and of fear, and it was inferior to the title of Master that was appropriate to be used by a "disciple" and friend.^[4] People continued to speak of Jesus as "Lord," of course, but it became just like any other title, and even more often it was one of the parts of the full name of Christ: "Our *Lord* Jesus Christ." But it is one thing to say, "Our *Lord* Jesus Christ" and another to say, "Jesus Christ is our Lord!" (with an exclamation point).

What in all of this is the qualitative leap that the Holy Spirit makes us take in our understanding of Christ? It is in the fact that the proclamation of Jesus as Lord is the door that leads to knowing the risen and living Christ! Not the personage of Christ, but the person of Christ. He is no longer just a set of theses and dogmas (with their corresponding heresies), no longer just an object of worship and of remembrance but a living reality in the Spirit. The difference between this living Jesus and the Jesus of books and scholarly discussions about him is the difference between the real sky and a sky sketched out on paper. If we want the new evangelization not to remain wishful thinking, we need to put the ploughshare before the plow again, the kerygma before the parenthesis.

The shared experience of the Lordship of Christ is also what most prompts the unity among Christians, just as we see happening

among us here. One of the top priorities of CHARIS, according to the directives of the Holy Father, is precisely that of promoting this unity among all the believers in Christ through every means possible, in reciprocal respect for each one's identity.

A Current of Grace for the Whole Church

I believe at this point it is clear why we say that the Charismatic Renewal is a current of grace for the whole Church. All that the word of God has revealed to us about the new life in Christ—a life lived according to the law of the Spirit, a life as sons and daughters of God, and a life under the Lordship of Christ—is nothing but the substance of Christian life and holiness. It is our baptismal life actualized in fullness, that is, not only thought and believed but lived and presented, and not only to a few privileged souls but to all the holy people of God. For millions of believers of different Christian Churches the baptism in the Spirit has been the door to such splendors of the Christian life. One of the sayings dear to the Pope Francis is that "realities are greater than ideas,"^[5] and thus that living the Christian life is greater than thinking about it. I believe the Charismatic Renewal can be (and in part has been) a great help in making the great truths of faith go from being thought to being lived, in making the Holy Spirit move from books of theology to the experience of believers.

St. John XXIII conceived of the Second Vatican Council as a "new Pentecost" for the Church. The Lord answered this pope's prayer beyond all expectations. But what does "a new Pentecost" mean? It cannot consist only in a new flowering of charisms, ministries, and signs and wonders as a breath of fresh air on the face of the Church. These things are just the reflection and the sign of something more profound. A new Pentecost, to be truly such, must take place in the very depth that the apostle revealed to us: it must renew the heart of the Bride, not just her dress.

For the Charismatic Renewal to be the current of grace we have described, it needs to be renewed itself, and the institution of CHARIS is meant to contribute to this. Origen wrote in the third century, "You must not imagine that the renewing of the life, which is said to have been done once, suffices. On the contrary, . . . this newness . . . must be renewed": "*Ipsa novita innovanda est.*"^[6] We should not be amazed at this. This is what happens in every

project of God from the moment it is put into the hands of human beings.

Immediately after I joined the Renewal, I was struck one day in prayer by certain thoughts. I seemed to be sensing the new thing the Lord was doing in the Church; I took a piece of paper and a pen and wrote down some thoughts that even surprised me because they were hardly the fruit of my reflection. They are in my book *The Sober Intoxication of the Spirit Part Two*, but let me share them again with you because it seems to me that it is the point from which we must start again.

The Father wants to glorify the Son, Jesus Christ, on the earth in a new way, through a new intervention. The Holy Spirit is appointed to carry out this glorification because it is written, “He will glorify me and take that which is mine.” A Christian life entirely consecrated to God, without a founder, without a rule, and without new congregations. The Founder: Jesus! The Rule: the gospel interpreted by the Holy Spirit! The Congregation: the Church! Do not worry about tomorrow, do not try to make something that will remain, and do not set in motion recognized organizations that can be perpetuated by successors. . . . Jesus is a Founder who never dies, so there is no need for successors. We always need to let him do new things, even tomorrow. The Holy Spirit will remain in the Church, even tomorrow.[7]

[1] Cf. Ex 31,3; Jg 14,6; 1 Sam 10,6; Is 61, 1.

[2] See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 5, 1, no. 392.

[3] See St. Augustine, *On The Spirit and the Letter*, chapter 28 [XVI], ed. Philip Schaff (No p.: CreateSpace Publishing, 2015), p. 53; *Sermo Mai 158*, 4 (PLS 2 525).

[4] Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, 1, 31 (Pinkerinton, OH: Beloved Publishing, 2014), pp. 31-32; (Sch 120, p. 158).

[5] Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 231.

[6] Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 5, 13, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 103 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), p. 359; (PG 14, p. 1042).

[7] Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Sober Intoxication of the Spirit. Part Two* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2012), p. 31.

PART TWO: “CHARISMATIC”

Now we move to the second part of my talk, which will be much briefer, about what the adjective “Charismatic” adds to the name “Renewal.” First and foremost it is important to say that “Charismatic” needs to remain an adjective and never be a noun. In other words, we must absolutely avoid the use of the term “charismatics” to describe people who have experienced the Renewal. If anything, we should use the words “renewed Christians,” not “charismatics.” The use of this term rightly arouses resentment because it creates discrimination among the members of the body of Christ, as if some people are gifted with charisms and some are not.

I do not want to give a teaching here on charisms about which there are so many opportunities to speak. My intent is to demonstrate how the Renewal, insofar as it is also charismatic, is a current of grace meant for the whole Church. To illustrate this affirmation we need to glance quickly at the history of charisms in the Church.

The Rediscovery of Charisms by Vatican II

What really happened to the charisms after their tumultuous appearance at the beginning of the Church? The charisms did not disappear so much from the *life* of the Church as they did from its *theology*. If we retrace the history of the Church, keeping in mind the various lists of charisms in the New Testament, we have to conclude that—perhaps with the exception of “speaking in tongues” and “the interpretation of tongues”—none of the charisms was ever completely lost.

The history of the Church is full of charismatic evangelizers, gifts of wisdom and knowledge (we only need to think of the Doctors of the Church), miraculous healings, people gifted with the spirit of prophecy or discernment of spirits, not to mention gifts such as visions, raptures, ecstasies, and illuminations that are also listed among the charisms.

So then, what is new that allows us to speak of a reawakening of charisms in our time? What was absent before? From their proper role of serving the common good and the “organization of the Church,” the charisms were progressively confined to the private and personal sphere. They no longer had a role in the constitution of the Church.

In the life of the early Christian community, the charisms were not exercised privately;

together with apostolic authority, they delineated the features of the community. Apostles and prophets were the two forces that together guided the community. Very soon the balance between the two aspects—that of the office and that of the charism—broke down in favor of the office. A decisive element was the rise of false doctrines, especially those of the Gnostics. This fact increasingly tipped the balance toward the office holders, the pastors. Another fact was the crisis of the prophetic movement spread by Montanus in Asia Minor in the second century that further served to discredit a certain kind of collective charismatic enthusiasm.

All the negative consequences for charisms derive from these historical circumstances. Charisms became relegated to the margins of the Church's life. There were still reports for a while of some charisms persisting here and there. St. Irenaeus, for example, says that in his time there were "many brethren in the Church who possess prophetic gifts, who speak all kinds of languages, who disclose the secrets of men for their benefit and explain the mysteries of God."^[1] But it was a phenomenon that was in decline. In particular the charisms that had worship and the life of the community as the arena of their exercise disappeared: inspired speech and glossolalia, the so-called Pentecostal charisms. Prophecy was reduced to the magisterium's charism to interpret revelation authentically and infallibly. (That was the definition of prophecy in the treatises of ecclesiology that were studied in my day.) People tried to justify this situation theologically as well. According to one theory by St. John Chrysostom, which was often repeated right up until the eve of Vatican II, certain charisms would have been reserved for the Church in its "nascent state" but would have later "ceased" since they were no longer necessary to the general economy of the Church.^[2]

Another inevitable consequence was the clericalization of the charisms. Linked to personal holiness, they ended up being almost always associated with the usual representatives of this holiness: pastors, monks, and religious. The charisms passed from the sphere of *ecclesiology* to that of *hagiography*, that is, to the study of the lives of the saints. The place of the charisms was taken over by the "Seven Gifts of the Spirit" (in Isaiah 11) that, at the beginning and up to

Scholasticism, were considered a particular category of charisms promised to the messianic king and later to those who had the task of pastoral governance.

This was the situation Vatican II wished to remedy. In one of the most important documents of the Council we read this well-known text:

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, "allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills" [see 1 Cor 12:11], He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit" [1 Cor 12:7]. These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church.^[3]

This text is not a marginal note within Vatican II's ecclesiology but rather its crowning achievement. It is the clearest and most explicit way of affirming that, alongside the hierarchical and institutional dimension, the Church has a pneumatic dimension, and the hierarchical dimension is in function of and in service to the other. It is not the Spirit who is in service to the institution, but the institution that is in service to the Spirit. It is not true, as the great ecclesiologist of the nineteenth century Johannes Adam Mohler polemically noted, that "God has created the hierarchy and has thereby provided more than enough for the needs of the Church until the end of the world."^[4] Jesus entrusted his Church to Peter and the other apostles, but even before that he entrusted it to the Holy Spirit: "He will teach you, he will guide you into all truth, he will take what is mine and declare it to you. . ." (see Jn 16:4-15).

At this point, with the conclusion of the Council and its decrees collected in a book, the danger of marginalizing the charisms reappeared under a different form. But one that was no less dangerous: that of the text remaining a nice document scholars would never tire of studying and preachers would never tire of citing. The Lord himself

overcame this risk by having a man see them with his own eyes—the man who had intensely desired this text on the charisms so that they could be restored not only to theology but to the life of God’s people. When Cardinal Suenens, for the first time in 1973, heard talk about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal that was appearing in the United States, he was writing a book called *The Holy Spirit: The Source of All Our Hopes*. He recounts the following in his memoirs:

I gave up writing the book; I thought it was a matter of the most basic courtesy to pay attention to the possible action of the Holy Spirit, however surprising it might be. I was especially interested in the talk of the awakening of charisms; at the Council, I had pleaded the cause of such an awakening. And this is what he wrote after seeing with his own eyes what was happening in the Church: Suddenly, St. Paul and the Acts of the Apostles seemed to come alive and become part of the present; what was authentically true in the past seems to be happening once again before our very eyes. It is a discovery of the true action of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work, as Jesus himself promised. He kept and keeps his “word.” It is once more an explosion of the Spirit of Pentecost, a jubilation that had become foreign to the Church.[5]

Now it is clear, I believe, why I say that the Renewal, also as a charismatic reality, is a current of grace intended and necessary for the whole Church. The Church itself is the one that determined this in the Council. The only thing that remains is to move from that determination to implementation, from documents to life. And this is the service that CHARIS, in total continuity with the Charismatic Renewal in the past, is called to render to the Church.

This is not just a question of faithfulness to the Council but also of faithfulness to the very mission of the Church. The charisms we read about in the Council text are “perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church.” (Perhaps it would be more accurate to say “necessary” instead of “useful.”) Faith today, as in the time of Paul and the apostles, is transmitted “not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4; see 1 Thess 1:5). If at one time in a world that had become “Christian”—at least officially—one could think there was no longer any need for the charisms and signs

and wonders that existed at the Church’s beginning, that is not the case today. We are back to being closer now to the time of the apostles than to the time of St. John Chrysostom. They had to proclaim the gospel to a pre-Christian world; we, at least in the West, have to proclaim it to a post-Christian world.

I have said up to this point that the Charismatic Renewal is a current of grace that is necessary for the whole Catholic Church. I have to add that this is doubly the case for some national churches that for some time have been witnessing a painful hemorrhage of the faithful to other charismatic entities. It is well known that one of the most common reasons for such an exodus is the need for an expression of faith more in keeping with people’s own culture and has more room given to spontaneity, to joy, and to the body—a life of faith in which popular piety is an added value and not a substitute for the Lordship of Christ.

Pastoral and sociological analyses of this phenomenon are being done, and solutions are being suggested, but it is difficult for people to realize that the Holy Spirit himself has already provided for this need in a magnificent way. We can no longer continue to see the Charismatic Renewal as part of the problem in the exodus of Catholics instead of as the solution to the problem. For this remedy to be truly effective, however, it is not enough that pastors approve and encourage the Renewal, remaining carefully outside of it. This current of grace needs to be received into their own lives. This is what the example of the Pastor of the universal Church, and the institution of CHARIS as well, is calling us to do.

I will mention some attitudes or virtues that most directly contribute to keeping a charism healthy and making it function “for the common good.” The first virtue is *obedience*. We are speaking in this case of obedience to the institution above all, to those who exercise the service of authority. True prophets and charismatics in the history of the Catholic Church, and even recently, are those who have accepted dying to what they consider certainties, obeying and keeping silent before seeing their proposals and criticisms received by the institution. Charisms without the institution are headed for chaos; the institution without the charisms is headed for stagnation. The institution does not suppress charisms but assures them a future . . . and also a past. That

is, it keeps them from ceasing to be a flash in the pan and puts at their disposal all the Church's experience of the Spirit from preceding generations. It is a blessing from God that the charismatic awakening in the Catholic Church was born with a strong impulse toward communion with the hierarchy and that the pontifical magisterium recognized in it "a chance for the Church"[6] and "the first signs of a great springtime for Christianity." [7] This obedience should be so much easier and appropriate for us today now that the supreme authority of the Church does not just praise and encourage this current of grace in the Charismatic Renewal but has clearly embraced its cause and proposes it persistently to the whole Church.

Another vital virtue for the constructive use of charisms is *humility*. The charisms are operations of the Holy Spirit, sparks of God's own fire entrusted to human beings. How do we avoid burning our hands with that fire? This is the task of humility. It allows this grace of God to go forth and circulate within the Church and humanity without being dispersed or contaminated.

The image of "a current of grace" that is dispersed into a mass is clearly inspired by the world of electricity. But the technology of insulation parallels the technology of electricity. The higher the tension and the power of an electric current that passes through a wire, the more resistant the insulation must be to prevent short circuits. Humility, for the Charismatic Renewal and for spiritual life in general, is the great insulator that allows the divine current of grace to go through a person without dissipating or, worse, causing sparks of pride or of rivalry. Jesus introduced the Spirit to the world, humbling himself and making himself obedient unto death; we can contribute to promoting the spread of the Holy Spirit in the Church in the same way by remaining humble and obedient unto death, the death of our "I" and of the "old man" that is in us.

As an ecclesiastical advisor, I have tried to offer my contribution in this teaching to an accurate vision of the Charismatic Renewal

within the history and current situation of the Church. However, it will be the moderator and the members of the international committee who will need to bear the major weight of this new beginning. I express to all of them my fraternal friendship and my unconditional collaboration as long as the Lord gives me the strength to do it. The Letter to the Hebrews recommended to the early Christians, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God" (Heb 13:7). We should do the same, recalling with affection and gratitude those who first experienced and promoted the new Pentecost: Patti Mansfield, Ralph Martin, Steve Clark, Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, and all the others who later served the Charismatic Renewal in the ICCRS, the Catholic Fraternity, and in other service organizations.

I conclude with a prophetic word that I proclaimed the first time I preached in the presence of St. John Paul II. It is the word that the prophet Haggi addressed to the leaders and the people of Israel at the time when they were about to rebuild the temple:

Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts. (Hag 2:4)

Take courage Jean-Luc and members of the committee, take courage all you people in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal: take courage you brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations: work, for I am with you, says the Lord!

Translated from Italian by Marsha Daigle Williamson

[1] St. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 5, 6, 1.

[2] See Francesco Lambiasi, *Lo Spirito Santo: Mistero e presenza* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1987), p. 278ff.

[3] *Lumen gentium*, no. 12..

[4] Johann A. Möhler, in "Tübinger Theologische Quartalschrift", 5, 1823, p. 497.

[5] Leo-Joseph Suenens, *Memories and Hopes* (Dublin: Veritas 1992), p. 267.

[6] Pope Paul VI, Address to the World Congress of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, May 19, 1975.

[7] John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 14, 1996, p. 8.

Source: <https://www.charis.international/en/the-catholic-charismatic-renewal-a-current-of-grace-for-the-whole-church/>
Occasion: official start of CHARIS, the new service of the Vatican to charismatic renewal. See www.charis.international
More texts from the conference in Rome 6-8 June 2019 at www.stucom.nl:
0458uk Pope Francis speech to leaders June 8th 2019
0456uk Pope Francis homily on Holy Spirit June 9th 2019

This is document 0458uk at www.stucom.nl