



ICCRS LEADERSHIP BULLETIN

Formation for current and new leaders in CCR

■ VOLUME XXV, NUMBER 2

■ MARCH - APRIL 2019

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

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LOOK FOR THINGS ABOVE

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Commission

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MARY AND ECUMENISM



So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2Cor 5:17).

God has given humanity the light of intelligence. Through it, we know what to do and what to avoid. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, Jesus came to reveal to us the new life in the Spirit.

What is this new life that Jesus promises us? This new life is a life of:

- **love** because it makes people act by the love infused by the Holy Spirit rather than by fear;
- **grace** because it bestows the strength of grace to act through faith and the sacraments;
- **freedom** because it sets us free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Old Law, inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity and, finally, lets us pass from the condition of a servant who "does not know what his master is doing" to that of a friend of Christ - "For all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" - or even to the status of son and heir (catechism n° 1972).

The grace of Baptism in the Holy Spirit that we experience comes to awaken this wonderful gift of faith, hope and love that will be precious treasures to cultivate to welcome the salvation of Jesus in our hearts.

For us Christians, the gateway to this new life begins with baptism and confirmation. How?

- By **renouncing** sin. The grace of repentance enables us to fully open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, and to enter into an attitude of forgiveness towards oneself, towards our brethren and to be reconciled with God.
- In **responding** to this call/appeal to holiness that Jesus makes to us. The discovery of being deeply loved by God, despite our sins and our weaknesses, will allow us to experience his mercy and tenderness. Faced with such love, our heart aspires to make things new. To leave the old man to put on the new man and to walk in Jesus' footsteps to become another "Christ". This growth in holiness is done less by the strength of the wrist and more by surrendering to the Holy Spirit.
- By **taking** time for God. It is in this heart to heart with Jesus that we discover how much we are loved by the Father. Prayer

becomes a spontaneous response of love and gratitude to God and the joy of trusting Him in everything, having the assurance that He will take care of each of our needs. *"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God"* (Ph 4:6). Accepting the path of daily conversion, that is to say, to choose God in every thought, in every word, in every deed. The power of the Holy Spirit leads us to a deeper conversion and a greater holiness of life.

- By **experiencing** and deepening the power of the Word of God that purifies, frees and heals. The Word of God revives in us the flame of faith, strengthens our hope and teaches us the secrets of charity.
- By **loving** as Jesus showed us.
- By **doing** gestures of forgiveness.
- By **practicing** humility following the example of Jesus who became gentle and humble of heart.
- By **sharing** with our brothers by going to the peripheries, as Pope Francis suggests.
- By **agreeing** to be different but complementary. This is why Pope Francis invites us to open ourselves to other realities.
- By **welcoming** trial and suffering as part of our lives and living them as passages of death and resurrection. A Christian no longer experiences trials alone but keeping his eyes fixed on Christ.
- By **committing** to bear and proclaim this Good News, following Jesus, to enter with Him in His mission.

Jesus, himself in the synagogue of Capernaum, gives us the purpose of His mission:

In the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 4:18-19, he proclaims: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Lk 4:18-19,21, NRSV).

This new life is accessible to all those who want to be followers of Christ. But let's not forget that as long as we have not left the old, we cannot enter into the new. This is the fight we have to engage in knowing that Victory has already been acquired in Jesus. 🏠

LOOK FOR THINGS ABOVE

Francis Edo Olotu · ICCRS Councillor



Easter is a season when we reflect on the cost of our salvation; if we were not precious to God, he would not have paid so high a price to redeem us (1Cor6:20). Looking for things above [Col3:2] means keeping eternity in perspective in all we do; it means choosing a lifestyle that reflects God's Kingdom values. The pull of the world to make us adopt its values is great. How can we fix our gaze above amidst the distractions of this world?

Here are some practical ways of looking for things above:

1. Do not love this world. To love the world is to accept the values of this world which are opposed to the values of the Kingdom. 1John2:15–16 “15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world”. Do not seek to be accepted by the world because the world loves its own, be prepared to be mocked and laughed at because you live by values of the Kingdom of God. Have the attitude of St. Paul who considered all his attainments as nothing compared to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ (Philippians 3:8).

2. Embrace lifelong transformation in Christ through the transforming power of the gospel. St. Paul made allusion to this transformation in 1Corinthians13:11 “ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways”. Ongoing personal transformation is a lifelong process of disengaging from habits that are sinful and contrary to our new status in Christ and imbuing values that lead to holiness. St Paul described this transformation in Ephesians 4:22–24. Bad habits die hard and since they were not formed overnight, rooting them out will take time and patience with God's grace driving the process. The Church describes this as interior repentance [CCC#1431].

3. Build a strong personal prayer life. Prayer empowers us to live victorious and fruitful lives; a Christian who

does not pray is a powerless Christian. In Mk 1:35, we see Jesus rising early to pray before the day's ministry; there is no better way of fixing our gaze on things above than through prayer. Pray in tongues daily to edify yourself [1Cor14:4,18]. Abiding in Christ is key to fruitfulness in ministry [Jn 15:4].

4. Frequent the sacraments especially that of the Eucharist and Penance. We live in a sin-infested world and very often fall into sin because of concupiscence. While the Eucharist sustains the life of God in us, Sacrament of Reconciliation restores our innocence after a fall.

5. Meditate on the Word of God. Pope Benedict XVI said “Lent stimulates us to let the word of God penetrate our life and in this way to know the fundamental truth: who we are, where we come from, where we must go, what path we must take in life”. St. Paul advises us to let the word of God dwell in us richly so that we will know the will of God and be renewed in our minds. Meditating on the promises of God will enable us to fix our minds on things above.

6. Cultivate a servant spirit. Learn to empty yourself the way Jesus did in your service for God. Always remember that God owns it all and think of your service as an opportunity to extend God's kingdom and not as an obligation.

7. Be involved in Evangelisation and Discipleship of the unchurched and nominal Christians. One on one evangelisation reinforces the message of salvation in you and makes you a more focused Christian. Daniel 12:3 tells us that those who lead others to righteousness shall shine like the stars forever.

8. Be baptised in the Holy Spirit. An experience of a personal pentecost not only gives you power but makes you manifest spiritual gifts needed for building up of the Church. Grow the fruit of the spirit in your life (Gal 5:22-23).

Conclusion: Setting our mind on things above enables us to live like pilgrims on earth. 🏠

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In addition, the *ICCRS Leadership Bulletin* can be e-mailed for an annual subscription of € 15.

The *ICCRS Leadership Bulletin* is published along with the *ICCRS Newsletter*. Its purpose is to publicise formation on decisive topics in CCR.

RECONCILED DIVERSITY THROUGH THE CROSS OF JESUS

■ John Duiker · Member ICCRS Doctrinal Commission



Baptism is new life through Jesus Christ. It unites the one baptized with Christ and his people and is a participation in his life, death and resurrection. This is not only true for those in the Catholic Church, but for other denominations as well, for 'justified by faith in baptism, they are incorporated into Christ...and...are accepted as brothers and sisters by the children of the Catholic Church' (CCC #1271). Baptism is therefore a sign of our common discipleship; we are one people and we have union in Christ through it (Eph 4:4-6). It is a sign of the Kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come. Although there exists an 'invisible' unity there are visible divisions.

Into this divisiveness comes the work of ecumenism: the overcoming of self-imposed barriers to visibly manifest our fellowship and so demonstrate to the world with even greater power the truth about God and humanity. This is precisely because humanity has a basic need to be delivered from evil and sin, alienation from God, self and others; that enslaving force which works 'death' in humans. The life, death and resurrection of Christ, together with the sending of the Spirit inaugurate the new world that promises to take us beyond sin and evil and all its power. This is the love of God, through the Cross, who gives life and transforms.

Pope John Paul II recognized the importance of ecumenism by stating "the movement promoting Christian unity is not just some sort of 'appendix' which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work" (Ut Unum Sint #25). This position was also very much an integral part of the leadership of Pope Benedict and now continues through the papacy of Pope Francis. In *Evangelii Gaudium* for example, he states: "If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us" (#246).

Our approach and openness to other Christian denominations has developed post Vatican II. Advancing from the position that unity was broken by non-Catholic Christians, that their separation was schismatic, and that an

ecumenism of return was the only option; to one which is based on the biblical concept of *koinonia* (or communion) where we honor diversity, seek reconciliation and live together in communion. Pope Francis, in a speech to religious orders and congregations in May 2018 touched on this important aspect of ecumenism by stating that the Holy Spirit is the author of diversity (by bestowing the charisms) but at the same time the creator of *koinonia*.

What is pertinent about these quotes by Pope Francis is that they echo the thought of Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullman, author of a book entitled 'Unity through Diversity'. In it he states that unity is only possible through the Holy Spirit and that apart from Him it is impossible. He also contends that the Spirit is the bringer of diversity as he is the one who gives all of the charisms. Cullman is noted as one of Francis' favorite writers and so it should be no surprise that we find his thought echoed in the words of the Holy Father.

So in light of our common baptism, we have rightly progressed from an ecumenism of return to one of reconciled diversity. This position is not about meeting with other denominations to examine the details of the doctrines they hold but it is more looking for people who know and love Jesus as the Son of God and the Son of Man, and are open and sensitive to the Holy Spirit. It is rejoicing in the diversity and richness coming from the creativity of the Holy Spirit, and a rejoicing together in the God-given differences that brings great joy and freedom. It is a real and decisive move away from theological discussions, prepared papers and handpicked representatives. It is a move towards praying and working together as brothers and sisters. It is not casting aside our theological differences, they need to be worked on, but it is primarily a move that recognises we are on a journey together that is led by the Spirit. It is Kingdom focused.

If all Christians have *koinonia* from a common baptism then they also have a common witness found through the Cross. As the late Australian Bishop Michael Putney states "through proclaiming the Cross and Resurrection of Christ we affirm that God wills the salvation of his people in all dimensions of their being, eternal and earthly. Our common witness means offering Jesus Christ". This is reconciled diversity through the Cross of Jesus. 🕯️

CROSS OF THE RENEWAL



With great joy we announce the resumption of the Cross of the Renewal production and distribution. The project, conceived and implemented in Canada by our brother René Brimo, now in heaven, to give a symbol of belonging and witness to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal's stream of grace and for the continued support of ICCRS in its worldwide service mission. Visit online shop at www.iccrs.org / www.arrediliturgici.it



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

MARY AND ECUMENISM

In many parts of the Catholic Church, maybe especially in the Charismatic Renewal, there is a tension on the subject of Christian unity. The temptation for the ecumenically-minded is to pay less attention to Mary and for the more Marian to pay little heed to Christian unity. The reason why this issue may be more serious in the Renewal is that the Lord has graced us all with the same outpouring of the Holy Spirit and brought us all into the same movement. With other ecclesial movements it is easier to opt for a more Marian movement or one that is more ecumenical.

First, both Mary and ecumenism are an integral part of Catholic life and faith. We have no right to choose between them. Devotion to Mary belongs to the heart of Catholic faith. Concerning unity, John Paul II wrote in 1995: “ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of ‘appendix’ which is added to the Church’s traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does” (Ut Unum Sint, par. 20).

Relations with Protestant Christians

Often in the Charismatic Renewal there is fellowship and prayer with other Christians who have been baptized in the Spirit. In some places there are regular inter-denominational prayer groups and even a few ecumenical communities. But in most places the meetings are more occasional. How should we approach such contacts?

First, meetings that are planned as inter-denominational, whether regular or occasional, have to be based on what is shared in Christ, recognizing that what divided Christians share is more fundamental than what divides (see Ut Unum Sint, par. 22). In these meetings, there cannot be direct prayers to Mary, but it is possible to pray together Mary’s hymn, the Magnificat. This limitation should not be seen as a problem, when the other Christians respect the faith of the Catholics. But Catholics need to express their devotion to Mary as well as their commitment to Christian unity. So the Catholics who attend inter-denominational meetings need also to gather as Catholics where there is freedom to honour Mary and the saints, just as they need to gather for the eucharist. So it is normal that in Catholic meetings to which other Christians may come as guests there is full freedom to express all aspects of Catholic faith including our devotion to Mary.

Second, we need to pray and work so that the question of Mary is not a “no go” area. Our first meetings with other Christians are not the right time to take up such major differences. They need first to experience us as fellow-Christians. Theological argument is never the right place to start when we want to build fellowship. We begin by getting to know each other, to accept each other as fellow-Christians and to develop a trust. At this stage it becomes possible to talk about Mary and what she means to Catholics. When relationships develop in a healthy way, the Protestants will often ask about Mary, maybe more puzzled than full of objections. As this question comes up, we need the light and wisdom of the Holy Spirit so that the answers we give will truly help them. We need to know the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church: on Mary, see Chapter 8 of the Vatican II Constitution on the Church and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 484–511, 963–975.

The Renewal of the Church

The right framework for approaching the issues of Mary and ecumenism is the whole programme of Church renewal launched by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. The two issues are very different. The honouring of Mary is an age-long tradition in the Church, that like every other aspect of Church life, needed renewal. The issue of Christian unity was a new topic, never before addressed in a Church Council. For this reason, the encyclical Ut Unum Sint goes further than the Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, because it is based on thirty years experience of the Church’s ecumenical engagement. Nonetheless, the conciliar decree laid down the basic principles which are still valid.

For the renewal of the Church’s honouring of Mary, the Council made two important contributions that are vital for ecumenism. The first was presenting Mary in the context of the whole Church, understanding her role as Virgin and Mother in relation to all aspects of the Body of Christ. The second was rooting devotion to Mary more firmly in the Scriptures. If Protestants are to open up to Mary’s role in salvation history, it will only happen through a thoroughly biblical approach. Very helpful here is the book *Daughter Zion* by Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. Once, this book was given to a Protestant pastor, who later commented that he had never realized these things were in the Bible. 🙏