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Guided by the Spirit:

CCR Contemplative and Charismatic

Cyril John



CCR: Is it possible to be contemplative and charismatic? There seems to be an impression among some that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is all about loud praise and worship, praying in tongues, lifting up hands, clapping, shouting “Alleluia”, etc. Hence people tend to think that charismatic and contemplative are contradictory and do not go together. But the fact is that contemplative and charismatic are not contradictory, but complementary. I know a number of people who were initiated through the Charismatic Renewal, but have moved on to a deeper contemplative way of life.

In fact the charismatic experience begins and continues to grow through a contemplative experience called the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. This experience could vary from individual to individual, but in reality it is a concrete experience of the ‘Grace of Pentecost’, in which the working of the Holy Spirit becomes an experienced reality in the life of the individual. This is something very similar to the grace of contemplation which St Teresa of Avila calls “spiritual delight” or gustos, the experiencing of God’s love.

That is why while referring to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Pope John Paul II wrote: “For this is what the saints are: people who have fallen in love with Christ. And this why the Charismatic Renewal has been such a gift to the Church: it has led a host of men and women, young and old, into this experience of the love which is stronger than death”.

The first moment of the Charismatic Renewal occurred about 2000 years ago at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit appeared as a ball of fire, was heard as a rushing mighty wind to fill the entire house where the Apostles were praying with Mary, the Mother of the Lord. And they were all filled with the Holy

Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. Since then, over the centuries, there have been many such moments when the Holy Spirit fell on one or many to bring as many as possible back to God.

It would be wrong to conclude that all the external manifestations at the first Pentecost at the Cenacle



were confined to the exterior only. The Pentecost itself was the result of contemplation and prayer by Mary and the disciples in the Upper Room. The extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit upon those present at the Cenacle was manifested with certain external signs which led to the internal experience of the Spirit in the Apostles. The signs are real, and their purpose is to direct us to the interior actions that they signify. During the Vespers of Pentecost on 29 May, 2004, Pope John Paul II hinted towards this: “I hope that the spirituality of Pentecost will spread in the Church as a renewed incentive to prayer, holiness, communion and proclamation”.

There are two kinds of silence – exterior and interior silence. Each complements the other. Each makes the other possible. Even when the external silence is achieved, the interior could be very noisy. What is important is to achieve the interior silence. Even during a vibrant exterior praise and worship session, one could experience the interior silence. After a time of loud and vibrant praise and worship session, the group is normally led to a time of absolute silence when members in the Renewal are called upon to experience both exterior and interior silence and enter into a time of deeper communion with the Lord. Without contemplation, the Charismatic Renewal would end up as “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”.

Prepare our people to be contemplative

At one of the gatherings of leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, a senior member of the Church kept on repeating that he could see a lot of prayer and shouting in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, but could not find the element of contemplation. Then the Bishop in charge of the Renewal in the region rose to point out that he could not find much of contemplation even among the priests who undergo 12 to 15 years of formation before being ordained. He wondered as to how one could expect

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ordinary lay people who have experienced a new revival in their life all of a sudden enter into a deeper life of contemplation.

The members of the Renewal need to be trained in order to grow into a life of contemplation. There are a number of spirituality courses that teach contemplation. Those in leadership should attend such training courses so that they are able to encourage others towards a life of deeper spirituality and contemplation.

How is it to be achieved?

St Teresa of Avila said that it took almost 20 years for her to become a real contemplative. God gives the gift of contemplation to those disposed to it. Contemplative prayer has two stages. The first is, acquired contemplation. This becomes possible when, in faith, hope and with a longing love, we reach out to God's presence. It begins with knowing in faith that he is really present and seeking with all one's heart to touch Him and be touched by Him. The second is infused contemplation. This happens when, through His grace, as a free gift, God gives us real awareness of His presence. This may come through a whole variety of ways: through experiencing the fruits of the Spirit - for example, love, joy, peace; through a heart assurance that He is present to us, or in some other way. Infused contemplation is given to those who keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking till the door is opened (Mt 7:7). For entering into contemplative prayer one has to sit and relax and then slowly and deliberately let all tensions flow away, Gently seek an awareness of the immediate and personal presence of God, seek peace and inner silence, let one's mind, heart, will and feelings become tranquil and serene, let inner storms subside. "Seek peace and pursue it" (Ps 34:14). This should lead one to the words of the Psalmist "Oh God, my heart is ready to praise you! I will sing and rejoice before you" (Ps 108:1). Then open oneself to an awareness of God's presence: He is present to our spirit and attentive to our awareness of Him. In and through and with Jesus, He pours out His Spirit, making one call out, 'Abba, Father'. He fills us with thanks and praise for His wonderful presence.

In silence, we seek God with longing, reaching out to Him. The focus of our mind and heart will be God. Allow the prayer to descend from head to heart. And when the heart begins to pray there will be an inflow of grace by which we know God in our heart in a new way. Spending time surrendering ourselves to God is one way of fulfilling his commandment "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind" (Mt 22:37). Our way of loving Him lies in surrendering each and every part of ourselves to Him and seeking to be loved and filled by Him. Surrender every aspect of our being: surrender cares and worries: surrender heart, feelings, love: surrender the whole personality. Look steadily at Him. His presence becomes more

real. Our prayer becomes nothing but a loving awareness of Him. God then responds. He wants to make our hearts his home (Jn 14:23). His presence brings a deep, spiritual peace; a greater serenity, a welling up of joy and love, a flood of grace, a strong desire to praise and thank Him. His presence brings power to serve Him and proclaim Him, to bear witness to His Kingdom, to bring healing in His name, to bring peace and unity to people of good will. When He has made His presence known or touched us with His Spirit and filled us with His grace and peace, we will spontaneously begin to thank and praise Him.

Fruits associated with being a contemplative charismatic person

Teresa of Avila testified to the effectiveness of contemplative prayer when she said: 'If you will try to live in the presence of God for one year, you will see yourself at the end of it at the height of perfection, yet without realizing it'.

In spite of our good intentions, we find ourselves powerless to overcome our weaknesses and faults like criticism, impatience, loss of temper, harsh words, grudges and the similar. But when we seek God in the stillness and surrender to Him through contemplative prayer, our weaknesses lose some of their power over us. Another effect of contemplation is to bring balance and healing into our lives. This prayer further helps us to reduce tension and nervousness.

Another wholesome effect of this prayer is that, through the action of the Holy Spirit, we become more fully and more truly human. The more we live in the presence of God, the more truly we become ourselves - the people God always intended us to be. Our capacity for genuine personal relationship increases and we grow in our ability to enter with empathy and compassion into the feelings, situations and needs of other people.

Let me conclude with the sound counsel given by St. John of the Cross: "Those, then, who have this supernatural gift, should not desire or rejoice in its use, nor should they care about exercising it. God, who grants the grace supernaturally for the usefulness of the Church or its members, will also move the gifted supernaturally as to the manner and time in which they should use their gift. Since the Lord commanded His disciples not to be anxious about what or how to speak, because the matter was supernatural one of faith, and since these works are also a supernatural matter He will want these individuals to wait until He becomes the worker, by moving their heart (Mt. 10:19; Mk. 13:11). For it is by the power of God that every other power should be exercised. In the Acts of the Apostles the disciples beseeched Him in prayer to extend his hand to work signs and cures through them, so faith in our Lord Jesus Christ would be introduced into hearts (Acts 4:29-30)". 🏠

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The Spirit blows where he wills:

The Lord Jesus, head of the Renewal

■ Maria José C. de Ortiz



On 1st June 2014 at the National Convocation of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal held in Rome, Pope Francis said: ‘When I think of charismatics, I think of the Church herself, but in a particular way: I think of a great orchestra, where all the instruments and voices are different from one another, yet all are needed to create the harmony of the music. Saint Paul speaks of this in the twelfth chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians. As in an orchestra, no one in the renewal can think of himself or herself as being more important or greater than the others, please! Because when you think of yourselves as more important or greater, disaster is already on the horizon! No one can say: “I am the head”. Like the Church, you have only one head, one Lord: the Lord Jesus. Repeat with me: Who is the head of the renewal? The Lord Jesus! Who is the head of the renewal? The Lord Jesus!’

Why the Pope after bluntly stating that the Head of the Renewal is the Lord Jesus asked twice: ‘Who is the head of the Renewal?’ Because he wanted to stamp in our hearts that no-one in the Renewal should believe that they are greater or more important than the rest, because the Renewal, as the Church, has one Lord (cf. Eph 4:5) and the whole body is called to grow up into him who is the head, Christ, in whom the whole body is joined and held together (cf. Eph 4:15-16).

Since the Pope was the advisor to the Renewal in Argentina, he knows it well from the inside. In reiterating the question of who is the head of it, he knows that sometimes some of us think we are more important or greater than others, we think we have the right to be teachers of others indicating to them what should be done, and therefore the Lord Jesus is no longer the head of the Renewal and we follow what one brother says or what another one says and this is where division, the plague begins, just as the Holy Father expressed. When we say we are Renewal leaders and the brothers and sisters begin to look at us, to what we do, to what we say, then the brothers and sisters instead of looking at the head, which is Christ the Lord, they begin to follow us and there the division begins. Like the early Christians, the “I belong to Paul” and another that says, “I belong to Apollos” (1 Cor 3:4) is repeated, breaking the unity of the body. ‘For what is Apollos and what is Paul? The servants through whom you came to believe, and each has only what the Lord has given him’ (1 Cor 3:5). Thus, we move away from the only one Teacher (Mt 23:8) and the plague begins as indicated by the Holy Father.

However, if the Renewal does not lose its way, and if instead of following certain leaders, we follow Jesus, the only Lord, the only Head, the only Master, Jesus’ prayer to the Father for his disciples will be fulfilled: ‘May they all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you... so that the world may believe it was you who sent me’ (Jn 17:21).

The Renewal having been born by the Spirit, just as the apos-

tlés at Pentecost, is called out to proclaim, to shout out loud the Good News which is the gospel in all environments inside and outside the Church to fulfill the mission that Jesus gave to his disciples, ‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation’ (Mk 16:15).

Renewal is a current of grace for the Church and for the world, as stated by Pope Francis and, previously, Paul VI and John Paul II. Driven by the Holy Spirit, it must be a united army serving God which may lead everyone to kneel before the Lord Jesus (cf. Acts 4:12). The Renewal united must proclaim the Good News to the world. It must proclaim that Jesus is alive and wants the salvation of all men, for God ‘wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim 2:4) and what we proclaim is not history that has been transmitted to us, but instead we have met the living Jesus so we can say with the Apostle John: ‘We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard’ (1 Jn 1:3).

The main grace the Holy Spirit has given to the Renewal is the baptism in the Spirit. Through it we know that Jesus lives today, is alive, He is risen from the dead and His Spirit is in our midst. This irrefutable truth is given by the Holy Spirit, who came down upon the apostles at Pentecost, and who continues today to come down upon all those who ‘from the heart’ make Jesus Lord of their lives. That same Spirit is who impels us to proclaim: ‘Jesus is Lord’ (1 Cor 12:3), truth expressed is powerful, because it comes from above, from on High, and no one can deny or refute, as no one could refute the apostles that Jesus is Lord after Pentecost (Acts 4:12).

With its eyes fixed on Jesus the Lord! who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Lk 3:16), the Renewal will always have Jesus as its Head, and joyfully will fulfill its mission: to evangelize, because to evangelize is to bring to the world the best of all the news, it is to communicate to men that God loves them and wants the best for them, which is His life flowing in all, life that does not end, since it flows into eternal life.

Brother servants in the Renewal: the Popes have described the Renewal as a current of grace for the Church and for the world. It is and will remain a current of grace only if it remains united to the vine which is Jesus (Jn 15), only if it satisfies its thirst for living water, for the spring that produces it, which is Jesus (Jn 7:37). We have believed in Jesus, we have given our lives to Him, we have made Him Lord of our present, past and future and he has kept his word by baptizing us in His Spirit (Jn 7:38). But here is the important thing: that now, perhaps after many years of being born from above (Jn 3:7) we may continue loving him with all our being, love that is expressed in the intimate, daily and prolonged prayer with him, in reading and daily incarnating his Word in our lives and in the frequent communion with him in the Eucharist. Only if we have that intimacy with him, we can honestly answer: “The Lord Jesus is the head of the Renewal!” 🍷



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

Should I seek religious experiences?

This question reveals a thirst. Perhaps it is the thirst of those who have been baptized as infants but who, in the words of Pope Francis, “lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 14). Or perhaps it is the thirst of those who have been seeking fulfillment in spiritual “alternatives” apart from Christ. Or finally, it may be the thirst of those who are active in their faith and who even received baptism in the Spirit in the past, but now find themselves in a season where the Lord seems distant.

In John’s Gospel Jesus proclaims, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture says, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38). Jesus himself is the answer to the deepest thirst of the human heart.

The vast landscape of Scripture, from beginning to end, is centered on a relationship between God and man through Jesus Christ. The purpose of the thirst God has placed in the human heart is this very thing—to draw us to Jesus. Pope Francis has emphasized the centrality of the encounter with Jesus: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 3).

Our spiritual seeking, then, must not be for spiritual experiences or a “spiritual high” in a generic sense, but for a renewed encounter with Jesus and a deeper awareness of the love of God poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. There is no limit to how much we should seek for that! As St. Augustine wrote, God “has awakened in us a great longing for that sweet experience of his presence within; it is by daily growth that we acquire it”. And St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote of the love of the heavenly Bridegroom that we experience only by the touch of the Holy Spirit: “Let those without experience burn with desire so that they will not so much know as experience”.

In Psalm 36:7-8 the psalmist sings of God’s love, “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. You give them drink from the river of your delights”. Commenting on this passage, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, “This is the love of the Holy Spirit which

causes a force in the soul like a torrent. And it is a torrent of delight because it causes delight and sweetness in the soul. And good people drink from it”.

It is clear from Scripture that God wants us to experience his presence and love more deeply. However, we cannot expect that this experience will necessarily occur right away when we ask for it, or that it will occur constantly, since there is much that God needs to heal and purify in our fallen human hearts. Our desire must be for God himself, not for feelings about God. Emotions come and go. Feelings are not reliable, but God himself is reliable.

We also must avoid the temptation to compare ourselves with others and assume our own relationship with the Lord is lacking because it is less emotional or less dramatic than that of someone else. God created each of us with a unique personality, and no two people will react exactly the same way when they encounter the Lord.

Thus in settings where we are seeking to bring people into an encounter with the Lord, such as the Life in the Spirit Seminar, it is helpful to encourage people to open themselves up fully to a new encounter with the Lord, yet balance this with a reminder that no two people will respond exactly the same way when the Lord draws near. Our emotions are

not a measure of how near the Lord is.

Jesus said to the woman at the well, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). He sees our thirst, he offers an invitation, and to those who respond he offers his very self. Then from our innermost being rivers of living water will flow forth, so that we ourselves may become effective in drawing other thirsty people to the Lord.

An underground source of water will only become a spring when it breaks forth from beneath the rock that confines it, as water flowed from the rock that Moses struck in the desert. This is an image of the need for every baptized person to enter into a life of ongoing conversion, to allow the Lord to break whatever is stony, closed up, and unbelieving in our hearts, so that his living waters will flow forth in us and through us. 🕯

