

Roman Catholic Charismatics

The origin of the Roman Catholic movement is not clear. Some claim that the charismatic renewal probably goes back to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), and Pope John XXIII's prayer that the Holy Spirit would renew the church as by a new Pentecost. Others say that Pentecostalism was introduced to the Catholic Church initially by Protestant Pentecostals.

According to Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan, both of them charismatic Catholics, the roots can be traced to Ralph Keifer and Patrick Bourgeois, laymen and lecturers in theology at the Catholic University of Duquesne, Pittsburgh. They received two books which greatly interested and spiritually stimulated them: *The Cross and the Switchblade* by David Wilkerson; and *They Speak With Other Tongues* by journalist John Sherill. Ignoring the advice of their bishop, Keifer and Bourgeois consulted an Episcopalian minister who referred them to a Protestant Pentecostal group. There, at the beginning of 1967, they asked for the baptism of the Spirit, and, full of excitement, began to talk in tongues. Upon their return to the University of Duquesne, they initiated other Catholics into the Pentecostal experience, and the movement began to grow rapidly. In a short time, there were groups in the University of Notre Dame, Indiana and other Catholic centers.

In the beginning the Catholic charismatic movement was quite Scripture-oriented, very similar to the Protestant Pentecostal movement. The emphasis was less on spiritual gifts and more on a personal relationship with Jesus and the developing of a Christian community. In 1979 the Australian Catholic Theological Association said that through the charismatic movement thousands of Australian catholic men and women were able to experience a deeper conversion to Jesus Christ, a renewal of faith, a new appreciation of the Scriptures, and an openness to the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In 1981-82 the Protestant character of the movement changed when the center of the World Charismatic Movement was moved from Brussels, Belgium, to Rome under the eyes and the wings of the Pope. The contents of their Covenant magazine also changed. Beginning in 1981, the magazine covers began to feature pictures of the Virgin Mary, the saints, Catholics praying the rosary, priests preaching Mary. There was a shift from the Bible to Pope orientedness, from Christ to Mary centredness. Today many Roman Catholic charismatics claim that they experience a deeper devotion to Mary and a greater appreciation for the Eucharist. Fr. Ralph A. DiOrio, an American charismatic priest and faith healer, writes that whenever feasible he conducts his ministry of healing in the presence of "the Holy Eucharist." For healing, he says, you can go to "Cod's select and canonized intercessors, patron saints such as St. Camilius the healing saint, the popular St. Anthony, and the renowned St. Therese of Lisieux, praying for protection against particular diseases. Many in our day might utilize prayer meetings, crusades, and missions and turn to gifted personages as Kathryn Kuhlman, Oral Roberts, myself, and many others who have been blessed with distinctive ministries, to intercede for healing." He calls the virgin Mary "our hope!" And he says, "to honor Mary is to honor Our Lord Himself." She is seen as "the person par excellence, as the intercessor for mankind's healing." She is also "the star of ecumenism." And as

queen she sits on the throne of heaven. In his prayer to Mary, DiOrio says, "O Mary, as a sign of your pleasure in what I am doing, pray for the healing of the whole world." Why has the Pentecostal experience found its home in the Church of Rome? Many Catholic authors have pointed out that the emphasis on subjective experience is in essential harmony with the traditions of the Roman Church. Says Benedictine monk, Father Edward O'Conner of Notre Dame, ". . . Catholics who have accepted Pentecostal spirituality have found it to be fully in harmony with their traditional faith and life . . . The experience of the Pentecostal movement tends to confirm the validity and relevance of our authentic spiritual traditions."

Not all Roman Catholics are overly enthused about Pentecostalism within their ranks. The bishop of Raleigh, U.S.A., Most Rev. Vincent Waters, in 1974, addressed an extensive document to his flock on Pentecostalism. In it he prohibited Catholics from meeting with Protestants in charismatic prayer sessions. Others are asking how the Holy Spirit can inspire different truths to denominations which hold different confessions and which are contradictory with one another from the dogmatic point of view.

On the occasion of the feast of Pentecost, in 1971, Pope Paul VI warned the charismatics, "Do not separate the Spirit from the hierarchy, from the constitution of the Church. The Spirit certainly blows where he wills (John 3:8) but we cannot think that he comes to us if we voluntarily withdraw from the vehicle which Christ has given us, in order to bring him to us: with St. Augustine we will say, that whoever does not adhere to the body of Christ, goes out of the sphere which is animated by the Spirit of Christ." He also reminded the charismatics that the doctrines of the Church have not changed. As he put it in the documents of Vatican II, "The dogmas and universal teachings of the Catholic church are irreversible per se."

Stay or Separate?

An often debated question is: Should charismatics stay within the Roman Catholic Church? Rev. Anthony Pezzotta was a former Roman Catholic priest, and now a missionary with the Conservative Baptist Mission, who teaches at the Conservative Baptist College and Asian Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. He strongly believes that converted Roman Catholics have no other choice but to leave their church. In response to the question: "Do you think there are genuine, born-again followers of Jesus within the Roman Catholic Church?" he replied, ". . . There are Catholics who genuinely follow Christ, but because of lack of knowledge of the Bible and lack of knowledge of what the Catholic Church is all about, they stay . . . But as they study the Word of God and grow they realize they cannot stay." Pezzotta claims that a born-again Catholic is no longer a real Catholic because he is automatically a heretic in the eyes of the church. He is saying in effect that he rejects the teaching that he became a Christian upon his baptism as a child.

Will the charismatics, who are Bible-oriented, remain with the Church of Rome or will they eventually leave? Or will they become totally absorbed, and turn into just another spiritual tradition under the official wings of Rome? Time will tell.

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